The MOTHER of ALL LIVING

ROBERT KEABLE

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THE MOTHER OF ALL LIVING

By the Same Author

SIMON CALLED PETER

"With a ruthless plainness, an almost bitter lack of false sentiment, and a truthfulness that is, at times, quite literally stark, Mr. Keable sets out this soul-Odyssey. It is a human and humanizing experience."—*The Sketch.*

"A novel of real distinction."—*Boston Herald.*

"Very well written, in a clear and vigorous style."—*The New York Times.*

"A queer jumble of heaven and hell. The novel is tremendously human and shows great literary power."—*The Dundee Advertiser.*

"In spite of the candour with which some of the love scenes are described, the book is by no means gross, and the story is very well told and extremely interesting."—*Truth.*

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY.

THE MOTHER OF ALL LIVING

A NOVEL OF AFRICA

BY

ROBERT KEABLE

AUTHOR OF "SIMON CALLED PETER," "STANDING BY," ETC.

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NEW YORK

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

THERE *has not appeared to me to be any necessity to disguise in this book the names of many of those places about which this story centres and whose very real beauty I have endeavoured as faithfully as possible to describe; but in this matter I have reserved to myself a certain liberty. Thus a reader may pick out the Umtamvuna on the map, and, if the river gods be propitious, may go a-spearing the mullet in its waters, but I do not guarantee that he will find Pamela Urfurd's cave a few miles from its mouth. It therefore, however, becomes necessary for me to insist that the principals of the story—Cecil and Hugh, Pamela and Chris—are entirely fictitious. I will not deny that a reader might hit on 'Springfontein' farm (and be as lucky in that event as I was), but I do assert that he would not meet the Sinclairs there—or anywhere.*

When, nevertheless, the 'Mallorys' and the 'magistrate and his wife' I have placed at Butha-Buthe discover their houses in this book, and when the latter recognise some of the features of that lovely mountain trail we once took together, I trust they will understand that I have so written because I can recall neither Qacha's Nek nor Butha-Buthe without remembering them with the utmost gratitude and affection. They have cheered so many of my days that perhaps they will permit me to offer them this book in an attempt to beguile some idle hour.

R. K.

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THE MOTHER OF ALL LIVING

CHAPTER I

CECIL had hardly spoken for the last fifteen miles. At first, on leaving Durban, she had been gay enough, and her father had been amused at her questions and vivacity. She had laughed at that city's greatest shops with the insolence of a Londoner, and it tickled him to remember how, six years before, she had hardly dared to enter them alone. Also, he reflected, in six months or so they would be marvels again, but for the time being he kept that reflection to himself. She had been enraptured by the masses of colour in the Berea—the purple of bougainvillea, the scarlet of flamboyants and the delicate blue of plumbago. Six years ago she had not had a second glance for them. And farther out she had acclaimed the glimpses of the sparkling blue ocean seen through the clearings of the thick-set bush, taken in eagerly the details of the little coast towns, and gone into raptures of mingled mirth and enjoyment over the corrugated iron villas draped in creepers and bowered in trees that stood back from the beach. Even he, accustomed to it all, had enjoyed the glory of the morning, with the great sun blazing over-head and the car humming smoothly beneath them. The air was fresh, the sea-breeze strong, and South Africa at her best.

But Cecil had gradually grown quiet. Her father found himself doing all the talking and discovered that his daughter had now no more than monosyllables in which to reply. He had glanced at her and queried: "Bit tired, dear?" but she

had looked quickly at him and exclaimed: "Oh no! I wish this might go on for ever," and something in her face made him smile secretly and look away. Even in the Club 'Jim' Eldred grumbled at Africa less than most, and he knew in his heart of hearts how much he loved her. He was watching, now, the weaving of the spell over his daughter. For six years she had been in England, at a select and irreproachable school. His wife had selected it, and he had agreed because he supposed that she, and not he, must have the say in such a matter; but he had never liked the school. Secretly he had wondered what effect it would have on Cecil, girl of thirteen as she had been then, keen, eager, brown as a berry, and half a savage as his wife used to protest. He had quieted his misgivings with the thought that he knew his daughter even better than her mother did, and that the school could not, after all, entirely cabin her.

Perhaps he had not realised, however, how much he had come to count on this return that the war had delayed over long. At the docks, he had hardly known her, and she had been shy with him. In the hotel, she had got over that, but she was plainly far removed from the colonial girl of the old days, and curiously enough, for all her long skirts and fashionably-dressed hair and grown-up ways, she seemed younger. But now they were really in Africa, leaving the civilised air of Durban far behind, throwing off even the clinging townships of the South Coast, hurrying ever nearer the blue-piled mountains on the far horizon, glimpsing, here and there, the huts of the natives, and skirting tracts of untamed bush. And, sure enough, the spell was settling on Cecil.

As for the girl herself, she could not have put it into words. In England, she had always been the colonial, and her friends had envied her tales of the free life out there. She had seemed an African to them and had known herself very far from English. She could even remember how, on first coming, she had hated the perpetually green grass and longed for the brown veld, and felt imprisoned in the endless

streets, and out of place in drawing-rooms. The remembrance that she had once felt so had long remained, but the strangeness of her new environment had naturally worn off. Now what had been a romantic story in which she had played a dream part was unfolding itself again before her eyes, and her heart was crying to her that this was her home.

But that was not quite all. There was another message in the reeling miles. Sometimes they spun through the thick forests of wattle plantations, the trees gleaming silver in the sun that filtered between their leaves, and she took in every detail—the piled logs in the clearings, the stripped bark arranged in long rows to dry, the acres of young trees, and the burnt patches of old ones. But there lurked a mystery, it seemed to her, in those lonely plantations. Or again they climbed out on to the hills of a native reserve, and she looked out over the undulating veld, the rounded kopjes and the deep-cut valleys. Little patches of unfenced cultivation clung to the sides of them, and on the crests clustered the brown thatched huts silent and deserted in the sun. She wanted to get out and look in. At school, the girls had listened entranced to her casual references to 'boys' and black folk, but back here the fact that she was living among an alien race who set her standard of conventionalities at defiance, suddenly confronted her as a new thing.

Once, at a turn of the way, they had come on a group of three Zulus, two girls and a man, who were talking at the edge of a plantation. She had stared, and turned her head to look as they passed, and then glanced, half ashamed, at her father, who apparently had not seen anything more unusual than he would have seen if three beasts had been by the side of the road. But she had taken in the strong lithe grace of the man as he stood there, naked except for his loincloth, posed for a sculptor, with his sticks in his hand. The sun glistened on the shining black back and the gleaming muscles. And the girls—one had a pot balanced on her head and wore only a grass girdle and some beads. She had big firm breasts and thick well-oiled thighs, and had been laugh-

ing, white teeth shining and her strange face radiant. The other, in a dirty blanket, leaned on a log that she was plainly bearing home, and looked sullen. Cecil had a sudden sense of fear, gone in a moment, but real enough. But it was not that she feared the savages; it was that she realised that she was looking on life, naked and unashamed, and that she felt suddenly that school had taught her less than she would have learned if she had stayed at Elandskop.

The car purred to the top of a little hill and her father slowed to a standstill. "There," he said, "let's get out that thermos and see what the Royal has done in the sandwich line. There's no finer place for lunch on all the road. Do you remember any of this, Cecil?"

The girl looked round, and her gaze rested seawards. "Isn't Port Shepstone down there, dad?" she enquired eagerly.

"Right! So you haven't forgotten in all these years, my dear. Yes, that's Shepstone, in among the trees—you can see the lighthouse. Harding's away yonder, to the right of that big mountain from here, and that's the Ingeli range. We follow the coast more or less. Those peaks right ahead are in Pondoland, and somewhere this side of them is the Umtamvuna. That river below us is the Umzimkulu. There's no view better than this all the way. Are you glad to see it again?"

Cecil did not reply at once. She sat back and drank in the surpassing beauty of the sun-drenched panorama, following the ragged green line of the coast with its white fringe where the breakers of the Indian Ocean rolled in from the vast unbroken world of sea that stretched immense before her, allowing her eyes to roam over the folds of the hills that stretched inland to the feet of the grey mountains far away about whose summits clung soft clouds, and drinking in the fresh, dry, cool air that seemed its very self to gleam in the sun about her. Then she turned and looked at him. "Oh, dad," she cried on an impulse, "why did you send me away?"

He laughed. "Well, Ces," he said, "someone had to teach

you how to be a lady and there was no one here to do it. Your mother was determined that you should not grow up a savage, and she was quite right. But I'm glad you take to all this again, for I want you to love Africa."

Cecil nodded sagely. "Yes," she said, "I'd have grown up differently here, dad, but somehow or another it makes me wonder if I've really learned the right things." She paused, suddenly discovering that it was not easy to talk to him.

He seemed wholly unaware. "You've seen a bit of the world, too," he said, "and that's all to the good. I want you to feel that South Africa is your mother-land, Cecil, but I want you to realise that England is away there too, very old and wise and rich and strong, Cecil. It's good to love the home, but one ought to know and respect the family, my girl. It's a pity there are not more young people about here who realise that."

Cecil heard him vaguely. She was suddenly aware that they were talking of different things, and it irritated her. "I didn't see half enough," she said. "They kept us in cottonwool at that old school. We used to be taken to see Shakespeare's plays and a panto at Christmas, and when we were in town Miss Alice always insisted on our going somewhere 'instructive' too—to St. Paul's, or Westminster or the National Gallery. But you can't *see* things with a mistress behind you, dad. I did long so much for you to have been there, and that we might have gone to an hotel in town for a bit and pried round together. Miss Alice always watched us like a cat. She was very nice, of course, but I did so hate her old statues and churches. I never could remember which was which. I liked it best when we went to Liberty's or Selfridge's to buy Christmas presents. I got lost in Selfridge's once, dad," and she laughed at the recollection.

"Tell me," said Eldred, amused.

"Oh it was in the model houses. They were great fun—like a maze. Steph was with me—you know Stephanie, Colonel Haverill's daughter, my great pal, oh! you would love her, daddy,—and suddenly we found we were lost.

We'd gone in at the £100 house and now we'd got to the £2,000 or something like that, and we hadn't an idea where Miss Alice was. Well, Steph said, 'Let's go and see the evening-dresses: then we can come back and no one will know where we've been,' so we went off to try and find them. But of course we couldn't. Instead, after pushing through thousands of people, we found the tea-room, and Steph said, 'Oh what fun, let's have tea!' So we sat down at a table and she ordered tea—she knew just what to do—and we ate no end of chocolate buns and things. And then came the awful thing. Steph got out her purse to pay, and she hadn't got enough. She was sixpence short. I hadn't a sou—I'd spent all my money. Steph went as white as the table-cloth, and I wanted to die. It was *awful,* dad. And then, what d'you think happened? An awfully nice man at the next table leant over and said to Steph: 'Excuse me, but I see what's happened. I was once in the same boat myself. Do let me lend you sixpence.' "

She stopped for breath. "Yes," said Eldred, "and what then?"

"Oh, we said we couldn't take it, but of course we had to. And then he came out with us, and we told him about Miss Alice and how we'd lost her, and he took us back to the £100 house and there we saw Miss Alice, looking awfully worried. He was awfully nice and said he'd slip off so that we needn't tell about the tea, and he did, and we just said we'd been lost. But it *was* fun while it lasted, and I wished we could have seen the gentleman again."

Eldred laughed. He was conscious of a shade of relief—for all that she was nineteen, she was still only a girl. Then he glanced at his watch. "Well, if you've finished, I reckon we'd best get on. We've still forty miles or so to do. In this clear air, it doesn't look very far to those mountains, but we've got to go up hill and down dale and the road at the end is a bit of a teaser. What do you say?"

"Oh I've finished, dad," she said. "And I'm longing to get home and see mother. Do let's get on."

Eldred cranked up and they sped off. Cecil relapsed again into silence, but this time for other reasons. She was thinking of the school and the friends she had left, and, truth to tell, feeling suddenly a bit homesick. This would be lovely, if Steph were here, Steph who was staying on another year and would be captain of hockey in her place. She visualised their little study, and the playing field with its sweet scent of new-cut grass and its deep-shadowed elms. Africa seemed foreign all at once, and then the road dipped and ran down to a spruit and they came suddenly upon a straining team of fourteen span of oxen, and a Kaffir with a huge whip, and a white man in coarse collarless shirt and trousers, who cursed him in ugly language. Her father put on the brakes and they waited to allow the wagon to get clear, and Cecil watched while the patient beasts under the yoke started to one side at the lash, the span of them writhing like a snake and then straining at the heavy weight. The white man ran forward and crashed a stick on the bony hind-quarters of the nearer ox, and the brute backed heavily, twisting its head, with its big dewy eyes. "Oh!" gasped the girl involuntarily, but her father took it coolly enough, speeding up the moment he was able and calling a greeting to the man who stood staring at her brazenly she thought. They were past and away in a moment, but she was conscious of a tingling in her blood, though why she had not an idea. But she thought again of the suave folk in the drawing-rooms of "The Lindens," and smiled involuntarily. If they could see her now!

An hour later they raced through a thinning wattle-plantation and out on to a level stretch of road high up on the sloping back of the veld. Her father, holding the wheel easily, turned to her. "There, Ces," he said, "you can see Elandskop now."

"Oh where?" she exclaimed, leaning forward, and then: "Oh I see. Oh, dad!"

It was still some miles away, but it lay in miniature below her, and recollections flooded back upon her mind. She had known no other home. 'Jim' Eldred had obtained the

concession when it was bare veld and bush, and the wagon that brought him had plumped down his few goods and his two boys and gone off leaving him absolutely alone. That first night he had grouped the boxes into a square and covered them with a sail-cloth for a tent. Cecil knew the story, and the exact spot, for Eldred had made a rose-garden of it, with great circling bushes of trees growing in turf and enclosing a central open space with a sun-dial. Bit by bit he had cleared land and built the homestead, adding room to room. It was long and thatched, and Cecil could remember the extensions and improvements—the making of the tennis-court, the building of barns and stables, the taking-in of new lands. She shared her father's love of and pride in the place, and in a way it meant more to her than an ancestral home often means to an Englishman. She had envied her brother Harold the inheritance that would be his, and now, as she saw it again, the old love and pride surged up in her. There was the house, standing above the little stream in its rocky bed, with the great bluff thickly sown with palms and wild bananas and bush which had been left in its untamed glory, a home of a tribe of monkeys, rising from the sea across the stream. North of the homestead, a break-wind of Madagascar pines sang always in the breeze, and from it sloped the open veld below the garden to the fringe of bush above the shore, not three minutes' walk from their gate, with the sand and rocks and limitless sea beyond. Far inland, sheltered in folds of the country-side, were the mealie-lands, and for miles northward stretched the pastures of her father's herds. Once out of the gardens, not a fence ringed them in for miles. One could mount and gallop away parallel to the sea, with the wind whistling by and the ceaseless thunder of the surf for ever in one's ears.

"How the pines have grown, dad," she exclaimed, as the car moved on, and then a dip in the road hid the view.

"Why, yes, they were only a few feet high when you left, Ces, weren't they? Do you remember our planting them, the year after the locusts cleared us out? We haven't had

locusts since," he added, "thanks to the Government measures that the old fossils grumbled about. And the cattle are fine this year, my girl. Why, of course, you haven't seen the Hereford bull yet—by Jove, he'll please you." And then, as they swung off the main road on to a much rougher track, "Do you remember the turn? We're on our own lands now."

"Rather, dad," cried the girl excitedly, "and look, isn't that old Jacob? He hasn't changed a bit. *Lumela,** Jacob," she called gaily, "how are you?"

The Mosuto herdsman, who had been with Eldred a quarter of a century, grinned all over his face as the car swept by. "*Lumela,* Missus," he shouted back, "how's Missus?"

"Oh dad," cried Cecil, "it's all coming back to me. Do you know I'd almost forgotten Jacob till I saw him then; and I haven't said *Lumela* for six years. I didn't know I remembered it. But I've forgotten mostly all my Kaffir."

"It'll come back, Ces," said her father. "Why you talked Kaffir before you talked English. I can see you now, a little brat in a *thethana,*† with old Emily as proud of you as if you'd been one of her own kids. She's dead, you know," he added. "Died in the Flu, that cleared off so many old faces. But I'm glad it spared Jacob."

"So am I," said Cecil. "I must make him show me the farm again—he'll love it. Do you remember how he used to gather *amatungulu* ‡ for me when I was a kid, and how he taught me to spear fish, too, dad, and to ride? Oh I hope I haven't forgotten that! Is Semena alive?"

"He's alive, but he's a pensioner, Ces. You can get on his back if you like, but you mustn't use him much. Still I'll have him groomed up, and I daresay he'll do you round the place. You'll like to have him, for old acquaintance' sake. But I've got you a new pony, dear, a beauty; got him up in Kokstad last Show; and I've kept him for you."

* *Lumela* (Sesuto), a familiar greeting = Good-morning.
† *Thethana* (Sesuto), a girl's narrow fringe worn as a petticoat.
‡ *Amatungulu* (Zulu), native wild fruit like a small plum.

"Oh, dad, you darling. I shall love to see him. Oh, but we're home now! Oh look, dad, there's mother waving on the stoep!" And Cecil lapsed into sudden silence.

The car turned in at a gate, held open by a grinning boy in a shirt and loin-cloth, new to Cecil, and indeed only a couple of years or so on the farm. But already she was his "missy," and he almost as eager to see her as old Jacob had been. They crept across the wide space where the cattle gathered at night, flanked with barns and stables; swung round the belt of the pines; ran along a hedge of aloe, and up a drive to the creeper-covered stoep. Mrs. Eldred saw the car stop and her daughter rush towards her, but could hardly realise that the tall well-set woman was her little Cecil. But in a moment, arms about her neck and kisses showered upon her, told their own story. Her own daughter was home again.

In a buzz of talk the family entered the sitting-room. Gwen, three years her sister's junior, could not contain her excitement. "Let's see her, mother," she cried. "Make her stand up and let's look at her. Oh, Ces, where did you get that dress? Have you many like that? Oh I do wish I had been to London!"

"Yes, look at her, mother," said Eldred. "I hardly knew her on the *Balmoral Castle.* That's what 'The Lindens' has done!"

Laughing and blushing, Cecil stood away from them all and glanced down at herself. Her mother took in the shapely figure, the jet black hair she knew so well, but done up so sedately now, and the English look of the fashionable sports-coat and skirt. "Oh but she is still my Ces!" she cried.

"I think Leonard's grown the most," said Cecil. "I honestly don't think I'd have known him if we had met in Croydon. You look so much more grown-up," she added, "than English boys of eighteen."

A servant girl brought in tea, dropping a funny half-

curtsey to her new young mistress. "Who's that?" demanded Cecil, when she had gone out. "She looks white."

"Who?" queried her mother. "Oh, Fanny—why, of course, you don't know her. She's half white, but her mother was a Griqua. She's been with us some time. The years have flown, Cecil, in a way, but you'll find we haven't changed much, perhaps. I hope you won't find us all very slow, dear, after England. There are no shops here, and no theatres and no libraries,—at least not nearer than Durban," she added.

"Rubbish, mother," laughed Cecil. "Isn't the store still here? I must go to-morrow and see Mr. Shenk. But you're right in a way. I think I shall have to learn to know you all again."

Her mother caught her hand. "No, no, *no,* Cecil," she cried. "We haven't changed that much, dearest, and mothers don't change, my darling. Kiss me again and then let's have tea. If only Harold were here, that we might be a complete party. Last mail he sent more photographs of his Rhodesian farm which you'll like to see." And Mrs. Eldred sighed a little, though Cecil did not notice it particularly.

There was time, afterwards, for an inspection of the place, and they went round together. To Cecil, things seemed smaller than she had imagined them, and she caught herself allowing her eyes to rove round the rooms with a smile. The stained boards, the home-made windows, steamer chairs, skins, karosses, horns—all the common furnishings of a South African homestead, seemed curiously rough to her now, and yet very homely. There was the old cuckoo-clock that she remembered from her baby days, and she glanced at her father almost shyly, remembering how, as a little thing, he had lifted her up to see the carved bird bob out and bow and call. The books in their old-fashioned glass-fronted cases greeted her as old friends; not many had been added in six years. She picked up a novel.

"That's the last from England, Ces; have you seen it?" asked her brother.

She glanced up and laughed. "Oh you quaint folk!" she said. "I read that six months ago!"

For hours they talked, and Cecil must tell again and again of her doings at school and of her impressions of England. Mrs. Eldred, for the most part, sat placid, her eyes following Cecil's every movement. Eldred himself, deep in his favourite armchair, smoked his Boer pipe and tobacco with even more silent complacency. Leonard chiefly asked questions which his sister could not answer, but he departed after a while to the stables where a mare was in foal and needed attention. While supper was being laid, the two sisters wandered out into the garden, and Gwen's endless questions dwelt lovingly on the ship and the voyage. Even the things commonplace to Cecil interested her. And as for Cecil, she heard the saga of the new bull, the story of the increase of the sheep and the commonplaces of the farm, with equal interest, but with wonder and a little quickening of her town-accustomed heart.

Later on Gwen took her up to bed; to the old room with the things that she had counted treasures still there, where she had left them. She wandered round. "Oh, here's my old racquet, dear old thing. But it's no use now, I'm afraid. And fancy mother's leaving the old monkey-skins up! It seems generations ago since Harold shot them while I hid behind a rock and felt terrified. And my old books —Henty's! All this lot will have to go. Heavens! fancy the days when I read Henty!"

"I like them," said Gwen shortly.

Cecil laughed. "Then you can have them all, my dear, for I'm afraid I don't. I must explore the book-cases downstairs, and especially the one dad always kept locked. Thank goodness, I'm grown up now."

Gwen jumped up from the bed on which she had been sitting and put an arm round her. "I believe you really are, Ces," she cried. "Do you know everything? Oh, what

talks we must have! Besides, you know, in a few months I'm to go now, and you must tell me heaps and heaps about 'The Lindens.' There's so much I want to know—and about London and dances and plays. Have you been to many, Ces?"

Cecil yawned. "Oh, my dear, it's too late to begin now, but I haven't been to so many. More than you, though, I suppose. To-morrow we'll wander right along the shore, just you and I. I'm longing to see it again, and I'll tell you all I know. There! will that satisfy you?"

Gwen looked at her, with the troubled eyes of a colonial girl of sixteen. "Yes," she said,—"if you mean it."

A couple of hours later, Cecil ran up her blind and leaned out of the open window. A glorious sheen of moonlight flooded the world, which seemed alive beneath it. Cicalas were shrilling in the garden and the sea booming on the beach. Far out, a line of lights told of a liner passing towards the Cape. Cecil, her thick black hair plaited into two long queues and in her white nightgown, looked very young. She drew a deep breath as she took it all in, and a little lump rose in her throat. Then she stretched her bare arms out, threw her head back and stared up at the misty stars, letting the breeze play with the laces at her breast.

"Now to be free and to live," she whispered.

CHAPTER II

WHAT a blessing it is not to have to wonder if it's going to be fine!" exclaimed Cecil at breakfast. "Gwen and I, mother, are going to have a wander on the shore all by ourselves this morning. You don't mind, do you? We've heaps to talk about, and I simply must see the river and the beach again at once."

Mrs. Eldred smiled at her eagerness. "You haven't changed so much, Ces," she said, "after all. It was always 'must' with you. But as you can't unpack, for your heavy luggage won't arrive till to-morrow at earliest, there's no reason why you shouldn't go."

"Suppose I meet you by the boat for lunch," suggested Leonard. "I'll bring the skoff, and then we can row a bit up-stream in the afternoon. I must see to the shearing first, but I can cut down across country about one o'clock. How will that suit?"

"Oh Len, how splendid! You are a dear!" cried Gwen. "And there's a cold chicken, if mother will part with it."

"Mother will," said Mrs. Eldred, getting up, "but if you two want a long morning, you had better get off at once. Take care of your head in the sun, though, dear," she added, kissing Cecil as she passed her chair. "You're not so used to it as Gwen is, and it's hot just now."

Ten minutes later the two girls pushed open the garden gate and stepped out on to the rough grass of the veld. A track led away from the gate across the grass, almost disappearing in the belt of wild bananas and bush above the high-tide mark, but giving on to the sand and rocks of the fore-shore. Cecil pushed quickly through the trees, and

stepped out on to the beach. "Oh, Gwen," she exclaimed, "how perfect it is!"

She might well say so. Great masses of tumbled rock upon which the sea beat in a continuous roar, were broken by beaches of shining sand and shell-fragments. To the south, not a hundred yards from where they stood, the little stream which flowed past the house debouched into a small lagoon that brimmed over a sandy bar to the ocean, and beyond it rose the thickly wooded bluff. Beyond that, again, in a great shining curve, the shore sloped away to a distant point some five miles off, a point that glimmered in the heat and a mist of spray; nor could you make out from here that well on this side the point, the Umtamvuna flowed into the sea. On Cecil's left, to the north, she could only see half a mile or so, for masses of jutting rocks hid the farther curve of the shore. The whole panorama lay bathed in soft sunshine; the sea glistened blue and foamy white; the sand and rocks and trees sparkled and glowed in the rich light; and the ragged banana leaves rustled in what seemed a whisper of welcome.

Gwen glanced about her unconcernedly. "Is it so different from England, then?" she asked.

Cecil was silent a minute. Then she gave a little sigh and sat down on the sand, digging her fingers into it and staring out before her. "You've no idea how different," she said. "There's a taste in the air that is different, and a light in the sun, but above all there's a feeling that we might be miles and miles from a house and alone on a desert island. You won't understand, but England is *tamed*. You always feel restrained over there. Of course I expect there are wild and lonely places in England somewhere, and I know this is tame enough really, but it's different. Fancy all that coast and not a person on it! I feel as if I could just shout for sheer love of being free."

"Very likely there are natives somewhere," said Gwen practically, "though probably not just now. They come down at low tide to get shell-fish, but not when it's high

like it is to-day. Besides this isn't the time of low tides. But come on! You're not going to sit there all day, are you?"

Cecil jumped up. "Oh no," she exclaimed, "let's get on. Which way shall we go?"

"Well, if we're to meet Len at one o'clock on the river, it had better be that way." And the two sauntered off together to the south.

It was a slow progress. Cecil had to renew acquaintance with every tree and shell and beast. Now she examined the tracks of the king crabs and now the spoor of monkeys. Together they bent over rock pools and hunted out hermit crabs and sea-anemones and sea-urchins, a mass of slow-waving spines of lovely hues. When the seas broke with a roar and foamed up the beach, they caught shell-fish from the mouths of whose shells waved a great pinky sail of flesh that seemed to writhe aimlessly about if you picked it up, but burrowed at once into the soft wet sand if let alone. Now they strayed up the foreshore and tasted the tiny wild dates, or picked sweet-scented yellow wild-flowers, or examined strange seed-pods. It was all magical to Cecil, and Gwen had the delight of playing showman. And all the time she kept up a running fire of questions as to the England she had never seen and the wonders of London. Cecil could not answer half her questions, but to the younger girl, the elder seemed still a much travelled and perfectly informed woman of the world.

Half way to the river, Gwen clambered up a big rock and surveyed a little all but enclosed bay at her feet. The sea ran in between great piles of rock which opened out on to a beach of smooth sand. The entrance was a tumbled mass of foam from half-hidden rocks, but within them was a sheet of comparatively smooth water some five feet deep at most which shelved gently to the beach. It was one of her favourite spots. You could go far out on the arms of rock, and, high up on them, see for a mile or more in either direction. You could fish from here and throw the line

beyond the surf, or better still, at this time of the tide, bathe in perfect security and isolation. It was this idea that was in her head now.

"Let's bathe, Ces," she called to her sister who was walking on the sand below her. "It's a glorious place and quite safe."

Cecil looked up. "But we haven't towels or costumes," she objected.

Gwen laughed merrily. "My dear, you're not in England, now," she said. "What do you want a costume for? There isn't a soul for miles and miles, and unless someone actually came along, they couldn't see you. There isn't anyone coming, either; I can see from here. And what do you want a towel for? The wind and sun will dry you in two twos. Besides, I thought you wanted to be wild. I'm going in, anyway." And she jumped down and began to pull off her jersey in the shade of a great rock. "You *have* grown up," she called.

Cecil's gaze passed from her to the invitation of the smiling sea, and then she turned her back on it and walked slowly up to her sister. "What about my hair?" she demanded. "It's all very well for you!"

"Let it down and plait it," cried Gwen. "Here, I'll do it." And in a moment the black masses were tumbling down and being as quickly twisted into a thick plait. "There!" she exclaimed. "Now let it get wet if it likes. It'll soon dry. Oh, hurry up; I'm longing to be in."

She slipped off her remaining garments and ran swiftly to the sea, a long-legged overgrown creature, but very sweet and gay, leaping in to the soft creamy water like a young colt.

Cecil undressed slowly, the lonely beautiful African beach calling her, the years of prim England slowly loosening their grip. A few yards out, Gwen's long arms beat the warm water into foam and she could be heard ecstatically exclaiming at the delight of it. Cecil hesitated no longer, and in a minute was running down the sunny beach. She too leapt

in, the water splashing about her, and, thigh deep, flung herself forward to its embrace. "Oh," she gasped, out of breath, "how heavenly. Oh how good to be alive!"

Joining her sister, the two girls clasped hands and waded out until the water was shoulder-high. There Gwen slipped suddenly free, and dived like a Samoan. Cecil shrieked as she felt her ankles seized, but the next instant was ducked and down in a smother of water. She came up laughing and spluttering, racing for Gwen who was swimming quickly away with a fast side stroke and calling: "Now what about your old hair, my lady!"

Twenty minutes later, they waded out and up the hot sand, Gwen flinging herself down in an abandonment of delight. Cecil stood by her, passing her hands down her limbs and shaking off what water she could, and Gwen, flat on her back, lay regarding her. "You've a glorious figure, Ces," she said suddenly and coolly. "I hope I'll be as beautiful as you are, one day."

Cecil smiled and sat down by her, heaping the warm sand over her thighs and legs. "Oh I don't know," she said vaguely.

The younger girl caught her hand and kissed it, spluttering the next moment because of the sand that was clinging to it. "Pig!" she said, "but, Ces, come here, I want to talk to you."

Cecil leant back on her arm, amused. "What do you want to talk about?" she demanded.

"Oh, lots of things. I'm so glad you're back, you know. It's rotten being one girl alone, and there isn't anyone near except Pamela Urfurd and she's eight miles away at Three Springs farm and no good either. She's always reading, it seems to me. I've been longing for you, because I remember you as being ripping, and now you're grown up, you'll know everything. There's such an awful lot that puzzles me. Ces, do you want to marry?"

Cecil played with sand and stared out to sea. "Everybody does," she said evadingly.

"I know," said Gwen, "that's just it. Everybody does, or, if they don't, they do worse things. Fanny had a baby last year."

"Fanny?" queried Cecil dubiously. Then she remembered. "Oh, the new Griqua maid. Did she, Gwen? I didn't know she was married."

"Of course not, silly," said Gwen.

Cecil looked vaguely bewildered. "But if she isn't married . . ." she began. "Oh Gwen, how could she?"

"Could?" queried Gwen carelessly; "easily enough, I suppose. What do you mean? Kaffirs often do that, and after all Griquas are very like Kaffirs. They're all very much like animals, you know. I sometimes wonder why they don't get half a dozen babies at once, but at any rate they come so quickly that it almost looks like it."

Cecil felt the hot blood ebb and flow in her cheeks. Gwen was her sister, but her cool discussion of things one did not talk about to anyone unless one had to, horrified her. For a fleeting second she pictured Miss Alice making a third in this conversation, and the mere thought was too much for her. If she could have seen the two of them lying as they were on the sand, and if she could have heard Gwen's words. . . . She rolled over, convulsed with silent laughter.

Gwen regarded her with increasing pique. At last she got to her feet, and stood coolly looking down on her elder sister. Cecil shot a glance up at her standing there, sand clinging to her body, her arms akimbo on her hips, and set off again. "Oh Gwen," she cried hopelessly, "really I can't help it!"

Gwen's face relaxed. She sat down again. "But you might tell me the joke," she said.

"M-miss Al-lice!" gasped Cecil.

Cecil wiped one hand clean of sand by the simple expedient of rubbing it on her person, and became more normal. "You've no idea how shocked she'd be," she explained.

"Shocked?" queried Gwen, puzzled.

Cecil nodded, sober now. "You are not supposed to talk

of such things," she said. "You did it so calmly, and Miss Alice would have had a fit."

"But why?" asked Gwen. "These things go on and it's not possible never to think about them. Of course one can't talk to anybody about them, but I did think I might to you. There's Harold, for example; have you never thought why he went to Rhodesia? Weren't you surprised?"

"Harold," whispered Cecil, and stopped, not daring to put her thought into words.

Gwen glanced at her curiously, struck by her tone. Then she smiled. "Fanny's baby wasn't his, if you mean that," she said.

Cecil flushed at the correctness of her sister's guess at her thought. "Of course not," she said hastily.

A shade almost of contempt passed over Gwen's freckled face. "But he was sent away," she added bluntly. "Father wanted him to stay and farm Elandskop, but there was a row, and he went."

"Why?"

"I don't know exactly. I think he was flirting with Fanny though."

To Cecil the thing seemed as incredible and monstrous as the other. It was as if some shadow of horror had fallen suddenly across the bright day. Silence fell on them both. Gwen was digging restlessly with her fingers in the sand, and Cecil lay on her back, pleasantly warm in the sun, staring out to sea. She saw her big, rather hulking brother again, and visions that she could not have named floated through her mind. Tears gathered in her eyes. "Oh Gwen," she said at last, "how could he?"

"I imagine he couldn't help it," said Gwen calmly. "He felt like it, I suppose, and after all Fanny is half white and quite pretty. No wonder father sent him away. She would have let him do whatever he wanted to, as like as not. Still, he was a bit of a fool. He might have chosen somebody decent and got married if he felt like that. He was twenty.

I shall marry at twenty, I know. Don't you want to marry, Ces? How would you like to have a baby?"

Cecil heard her in a kind of dream. Dimly she had a feeling that it could not be quite real. Gwen, her baby sister as she thought of her, was coolly putting her most secret occasional thoughts into words, touching lightly on mysteries which Miss Alice and six years at "The Lindens" had blanketed around and hidden away from sight. People got married, of course, and women had children, but it was not a subject for so definite a conversation even with one's sister, and as for what she called in her own mind the tragedy of Harold, it was too awful. Her own brother even looking twice at a Griqua woman! That, at any rate, was clear enough. This was a strange new world into which she had returned. But she knew what to do. She spoke firmly.

"Gwen, I *won't* believe such an awful thing of my own brother, and you're not to think of it or speak of it again. I shall forget all about it. And as for marrying, dear, don't you trouble about that yet awhile. I'm glad you're going to 'The Lindens' yourself before Christmas. Lessons and games will take up all your time then. Promise me you won't think of such things, Gwen."

The younger girl threw her sandy arms round her sister's neck and kissed her. Then she slipped her arm round her waist and played with the big plait of hair that fell over her shoulder. "I won't, Ces," she said. "But I had to talk to you. I've bottled things up for so long. And you mustn't hate me. It comes from being alone, I expect. But haven't you ever been in love, Ces?"

"No," said Cecil, smiling, "not in love. There was a nice man on board ship, and I rather liked Steph's brother Archie—she was my great chum, you know—but I didn't *love* any of them. I've had too much else to think about. Come on, let's dress."

Gwen was reluctant to move. "I thought you'd know

all about it," she said gravely, "but I don't believe you do. Haven't you ever been kissed, Cecil?"

Cecil laughed heartily at last, and was glad to be able to do so. "Yes," she said, "once, by Archie—under the mistletoe, and that doesn't count. Why, have you?"

Gwen jumped up hastily, but Cecil was too quick for her and caught her by the arm. "Tell me, Gwen," she said.

"Oh, it's nothing," said the younger girl, not looking at her—"only a joke, anyway. Yes, let's dress;" and she shook her sister off and ran to her clothes, brushing sand off as she went.

Cecil followed quietly, until, half way over, she realised suddenly that there she was, coolly walking across an open beach with less on than a Kaffir. She glanced round with the instinct of civilisation and ran hastily to her rock. "We'll be late for lunch," called Gwen, struggling into her things. "Oh I won't be a minute," said Cecil. "Isn't it perfectly glorious here? I feel tingly all over after that dip."

But she glanced at her sister once or twice as she dressed, and registered a decision. She would open up the latter part of the subject again, one day, anyhow. She ought to do, she told herself, because she was the elder and Gwen might be getting herself into trouble. She wanted to do so, she knew deep down, because she felt strangely ignorant and Gwen seemed to know so much. But she was half ashamed of that, and the two finished their dressing almost in silence.

Half a mile on, the slight cliff of the shore receded and thick flat scrub took its place. The sand widened and deepened here, and it was plain it had been piled up by the meeting of the sea and river. So sure enough it had, and the two girls, stumbling heavily through the loose stuff, climbed a bank of it and discovered the estuary beyond. The Umtamvuna is a fine river, and if not as beautiful at its mouth as a mile or two up where it winds between cliffs a thousand feet high and clothed with semi-tropical forest,

still it was a glorious sight to Cecil. "Oh," she exclaimed, "it hasn't changed a bit. Do you still keep the boat under the old mangrove tree?"

"Can't any more," said Gwen, "for it blew down last year. But there's a sort of shelter under a rock a little higher up, and it's quite shut in by bushes from the shore. We keep it up there, and it's a splendid picnic place too. Len's there now."

"How do you know that?" demanded Cecil.

Gwen laughed. "Where are your eyes, my dear? Look along the river-bank now, past that banana-clump that stands out a bit on the shore. Now, can't you see smoke among the leaves beyond?"

"Oh yes, of course I do. How stupid of me! Let's race."

"Right, I'll beat you," shouted Gwen, and was away like a flash.

But "The Lindens" had taught Cecil something useful anyway. Not for nothing had she captained the hockey and won prizes for sports. Half way along she passed her sister, and was half a dozen yards in front when she bent herself almost double and dived in among the trees. Out of breath and hot, her hair in her eyes and her hat on her neck, she failed to see a man who was gathering some sticks for the fire, and stumbled up against him.

"Oh Len," she gasped, "we've had—glorious—bathe, and I can—still race—— Oh!" And she broke off. "Oh, I beg your pardon!"

But Gwen was close behind her. "Hullo! you here, Hugh," she panted. "How topping. Where's Len?"

The man was facing them now and smiling broadly. "Morning, Gwen," he said. "Yes, I'm here. I turned up over some cattle, and Len brought me along. He's gone for water. But don't you think you ought to introduce me to your sister?"

"Of course not," said Gwen, throwing herself down by the fire. "You know her, or at least you did. Ces, this is Hugh Sinclair of Springfontein. Don't you remember?"

Sinclair held out his hand. "You weren't much more than eleven or twelve when I saw you last, Miss Eldred," he said, "and as I'm eight years older than Harold, you know, I don't suppose you do remember me. I should hardly have known you again, anyhow, I confess. You've changed out of all knowledge."

Cecil had recovered herself, and had pushed back her hair and set her hat on her head. "How do you do?" she asked, shaking his hand. "Oh yes, I do remember you now. You don't look a day older. But I thought Springfontein was miles away."

"Well, it's no nearer than it used to be, but we've a decent road and motors in these days, you know. You can do it in a day. I hope I'll be able to show you soon. But I started a bit late and slept at Murchison Flats on the road down yesterday, leaving there after breakfast this morning. It was an early breakfast, though, and I confess I'm looking forward to that chicken. Thank goodness, here's Len."

Len came in with the kettle. "Hullo, you two, on time are you? Been bathing? How do you like the water, Ces? Bit warmer than England, isn't it?"

"Oh it was lovely," cried Cecil. "I've never enjoyed a bathe so much."

"We hadn't towels or anything," said Gwen coolly, "and we dried in the sand afterwards. Cecil thought it wasn't proper at first."

"Gwen!" gasped Cecil, scarlet.

Sinclair came to the rescue. "It's much the best way of bathing," said he, taking the kettle from Leonard and going to the fire. "I'm all for a dip like that when I get a chance. But get out of the way, Gwen, and let me put the kettle on, unless you'd rather do it yourself. I don't know if you've discovered how lazy your sister is, Miss Eldred," he added.

Gwen moved to one side and gathered her feet up under her, clasping her hands round her knees. "The first thing

to remember about Hugh, Ces, is that he never means what he says," she announced.

The kettle on, Sinclair pulled up a half-log for Cecil and sat down beside it himself. While they ate, she was rather silent, but the others talked so fast that no one seemed to notice it. What her sister had told her of her eldest brother, refused to be banished, and she could not look at the two men near her without thinking of it. Somehow she felt she could fit it on to what she remembered of Harold, a big fellow even at sixteen as he was when she had gone to school. He had grown up on the farm, old beyond his years, and his father had taught him all he knew. It was the example of Harold before her, that had urged Mrs. Eldred to send her second child and elder daughter away to England, determining that what she could hardly have helped in his case, she would certainly not allow in Cecil's. But Hugh Sinclair was of a different make altogether. He was English born, and if he had left home and a public school too young for much education, and knocked about the world a good deal since, at any rate he had kept the stamp of a gentleman. Strong and finely built, if a little heavy, he was very courteous to her. Sitting here, by the camp fire, her mug of tea planted in the fallen leaves and sand, and the sun filtering through the boughs overhead, she could hardly believe that a couple of months before she had been in Miss Alice's drawing-room. The contrast delighted her. She burst into a laugh, suddenly, at the idea.

Len looked up. "What's the joke, Ces?" he demanded.

"Nothing," she said, a little confused and conscious that Hugh Sinclair's eyes were on her. "Only this is such a contrast to 'The Lindens.' You haven't an idea. Why in the world does anyone stay in England, I wonder!"

"You didn't enjoy yourself much over there, then, Miss Eldred?" said Hugh.

"Oh yes I did," she declared. "I wouldn't have missed going for anything in a way. But I think I should have been

less content if I had realised that you people were doing this sort of thing every day. Even as it was, I used to feel stifled at times. Sometimes, when they were bored with life, the girls used to make me tell them tales of Africa, and just talking about it made me long to get out again."

Hugh nodded. "That's the call of the blood," he said. "But it's curious some people have it and some haven't. My people were English bred and had lived in England all their lives, but yet I felt that I must smell the blue sea and get out of the old country. I took the first chance and came, though I expect I would have stuck there if I hadn't. But you will never be sorry that you were at 'The Lindens,' Miss Eldred. I'm always wishing I'd had more education. You feel it when you mix with fellows who have."

"That's rot, Hugh," asserted Gwen. "I'd sooner have you than any of those idiots who make you feel as if you had never read anything or been anywhere."

Len chuckled. "She's proposing to you, Sinclair," he said.

Gwen flushed suddenly beneath her tan and kicked out at him across the embers with her foot. "Don't talk rot," she said. "Hugh knows what I mean."

Hugh got to his feet. "I think I do, Gwen," he said, "and it's good of you to say it. But you're not right, for all that. However, the day's going. Let's get the boat out and pull up the river. What do you say, Miss Eldred?"

"Oh rather," cried Cecil, springing up. "I'm dying to see the river again and it will be a perfect afternoon. Where's the boat? Come on, Len."

That worthy got up with a sigh. "I've only just settled that skoff down," he said. "You two are in a confounded hurry. Still there's no rest for the wicked, I suppose. Give Gwen a hand with the sculls, Ces, and Sinclair and I will see to the boat. Come on, Sinclair."

The sculls were hidden cleverly up the boughs of a big tree, and when the girls emerged with them, the men had already got the boat afloat from its place among some

bushes. Sinclair was in her, his coat off and his sleeves rolled up. He helped Cecil in and she took the tiller. "I'll steer," she said.

"Right," said Hugh, "and I'll scull her up, anyway. Get over there by your sister, Gwen, and trim her. I believe you're heavier than Miss Eldred."

Len pushed the light boat off with a vigorous shove, leapt on board, and curled himself up in the bows. Hugh paused a minute to light his pipe, and then began to pull leisurely up stream.

Silence settled down on them. In a little the river narrowed, and soon they were gliding under the great krantzes, thick with bush except where the naked rock stood out, and by the cultivated patches of native land wherever, for a few yards, the cliffs stood back from the water. Toucans called from the thickets, and now and again a green and blue and gold kingfisher regarded them solemnly from his perch or skimmed up-stream before their approach. Far off, from somewhere high up on the rocks, a baboon barked to its mate, and Cecil dreamily wondered if Paradise itself had been more lovely.

CHAPTER III

THE morrow was Saturday, and at breakfast, when Sinclair referred to his return, there was a chorus of disapproval. Eldred, with colonial hospitality and brusqueness, set the suggestion aside at once. "Oh rubbish," he said. "It's weeks since you were here, and you can stay over the week-end anyhow. You needn't tell me that it is so important as all that for you to get back." And his wife supported him. "Oh yes, do stay, Mr. Sinclair," she said. "You'll help us to break Cecil in to the quietness of Elandskop."

He smiled. "Well," he said, "my shearing's done, it's true, but I can't help thinking that you want Miss Eldred to yourselves just at present. After six years, you'll have so much to say to each other that a stranger will be in the way."

"A stranger might, but you're no stranger, Hugh," put in Gwen.

"Gwen," said her mother, "you ought not to call Mr. Sinclair 'Hugh.' You're not a child any longer. You should snub her, Mr. Sinclair."

"Oh please don't say that, Mrs. Eldred," said Hugh. "We've known each other too long for ceremony. Miss Eldred, it's your fault. You make us all feel intensely proper."

Cecil laughed easily. "For goodness' sake, don't say that," she cried. "I'm beginning to feel already as if I had never been away, and then you suggest fearful things like that! Do stay, anyway, and get over it."

"There you are, Sinclair," said Eldred. "The meeting's *nem. con.* against your going, and you've plainly a reason for staying. You can't go now."

"I don't feel I can," he said lightly, but he glanced at Cecil as he spoke and she felt instantly that the words meant more than appeared. A ripple of feeling ran through her, and her blood danced. She felt suddenly that it was amazingly good to be alive and pretty and nicely dressed. It was a first taste of power and was far more vivid than she would have allowed.

"That's settled then," she said, pushing her chair back. "Now, please, outline the programme."

Eldred got up. "Count me out this morning, anyway," he said, "and Len, I shall want you. Jacob says some of the cattle are sick and you had better go and look at them. But what do you say to spearing some fish to-night? The mullet are thick in the river and the tide will be just right. We've got a new grains, Cecil, and you might like to see the fun."

"Oh, dad, how splendid," she cried. "You are a dear for thinking of it. What do you say, Mr. Sinclair?"

"Topping," he said. "That's a thing you don't get my way. Len's a Trojan at it, but the last time I tried, I threw myself overboard as well as the spear."

"You did," said Gwen in her cool way, "but you went over very nicely, Hugh, if you remember, and when we fished you out, we found you had your fish all right."

They all laughed, and the thing was settled. Eldred and his son went off to the farm, and Mrs. Eldred to the kitchen. The other three strolled out into the garden and Hugh produced his cigarette case. "Do you smoke, Miss Eldred?" he said, offering it.

"No, thanks," she replied.

"I'll have one, though, Hugh," said Gwen, "thanks very much."

"I'm sorry," he apologised. "I thought you kept that for more private occasions."

"Well, I do," she replied. "But everybody's gone, and besides I want one. Don't look so shocked, Ces," she added.

Cecil felt absurdly nettled. "I'm not," she said; "you

can smoke if you want to. It seems to me that you do most of the things you want to do, anyhow."

Gwen pulled on her cigarette and blew out the smoke like a boy, but with a curious grace that characterised her. "Do I, Hugh?" she demanded evenly.

He laughed, slightly self-consciously Cecil thought. "You've ruled the roost I think," he said. "It's a good thing your sister has come home. But what's to be the programme, Miss Eldred? It's up to you to choose."

"I hardly know what's possible," she replied. "What do you think, Gwen?"

"I've a mind to think nothing," retorted that young lady, "but go off by myself with a book till Hugh seeks me out with chocolates and apologies. However, I'll be merciful. Wherefore I suggest what you hinted at yesterday: a stroll through the gardens and over the veld to the store. Then back and a bathe before lunch. As Hugh will be with us, you can put on your most chic costume this time, Cecil. And you can wear one of Len's, Hugh."

"'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings,'" Sinclair said gravely, poking fun at her; "but really it's a splendid plan. And possibly old Shenk may have the very chocolates of which you speak. What do you say, Miss Eldred?"

"Gwen justifies her existence, I think," said Cecil. "Let's get hats and stroll off at once." And she pushed her arm into her sister's.

They followed a little path through the pines down to the stream, over its boulders, and up the side of the hill through a fruit garden of pine-apples, oranges, bananas and mangoes. It was hot, but only deliciously so, and they walked slowly. To Cecil every step of the way brought back memories.

"I remember old Jacob beginning this garden," she exclaimed. "He had a Kaffir to help him, and complained to father, after a bit, that the Kaffir did nothing but wait with an old gun to shoot monkeys which he alleged came to steal the fruit and sweet potatoes. Do they still come, Gwen?"

"Oh, yes, but not so many," said Gwen. "Several have been shot over there on the edge of those orange trees, and I think they're frightened of the place a bit. Or perhaps we have so much fruit now that we don't miss it." And she stooped to pick up a ripe fallen mango as she spoke.

"Keep that to eat in the sea," said Hugh. "They say you can only eat these things in a bath, Miss Eldred."

"Rot—lend us your knife, Hugh," said Gwen, and she deftly cut the fruit, peeled away the skin, and sucked it gingerly. Then, making a grimace, she threw it away. "Turpentiney," she explained. "Come on; we shall never get to the store."

She set off ahead, up the steep path and on to the flat veld at the top. The other two followed more slowly, finding plenty to talk about and something at every step that Cecil wanted to examine. She asked innumerable questions, and Hugh had to confess himself beaten more often than not. She picked a small wild scarlet zinnia and demanded its name.

"I don't know," he confessed. "I fear you'll find us all terrible duffers, Miss Eldred. I can tell you the grasses that are good for cattle and give you a lecture on mealies and Kaffir corn, cattle and sheep, but I'm stumped beyond that. We don't think about other things much, and somehow there isn't time."

Cecil liked his candour. "You've bigger things to do," she said. "That's what I like about African men. You can do things, if you don't know much. Oh, at least, I don't mean that——"

"Yes, you do," he cut in. "And you're quite right. What's more, we ought to know more than we do. But one lives so much among poor whites and natives, and talks farm shop whenever one meets a neighbour, that other things get forgotten. That's why it's so jolly meeting you. You're so different from girls that have never been home."

"Am I?" queried Cecil. "I wonder. What's the good of half the things one learned over there? You don't know how

prim and proper they kept us. Even Gwen makes me feel as if I were her age and she were mine. I've learned some French and German (and not enough of them to be of any real use) but I don't know about life at all. Gwen can run the house; I shouldn't even know how to order the dinner!"

He laughed. "Gwen's an awfully good sort and a great pal of mine," he said, "but you show her up. You make me feel, suddenly, that riding and farming and shooting are not everything. Do you know you make me realise that my people are the Sinclairs of West Haven. This isn't snobbishness, Miss Eldred—please don't think it is. And I hope to goodness that I haven't forgotten I was born a gentleman, though of course one doesn't talk about it. But you make a fellow pull himself together, somehow. You remind me of my sisters and home. And it's very good to be reminded."

Cecil did not look at him. She felt quaintly happy, but she could not have put her feelings into words. She bent forward and pulled at a long grass. "Tell me about your life out here," she said softly.

"I came out thirteen years ago," said Hugh, "and I've never been home since. I was only seventeen then. I came out to a farmer near Maritzburg, a friend of my father, and I had a pretty rough time, I can tell you. I've trekked right through East Griqualand, many a time, and there weren't so many roads then. I used to go off alone with some boys and buy cattle in Pondoland and in Basutoland. I got to know your father then: he was just getting settled here, and you were a tot of a girl who always stared strangers out of countenance with those big eyes of yours. Then came a Zulu rising, and I joined up for that and got a liking for the life, went up to Rhodesia in the police, and stayed there several years. But it was awfully rough and slow work most of the time, and, besides, it led to so little. So I came back here, and had a chance to buy Springfontein. It was your father who advised me to take it. I came down to see him and got his advice a few months before you left for England,

but I only stayed for one night and I don't suppose you remember."

"You sat out on the stoep smoking cigars," said Cecil gravely, "and a native came in the middle and said your horse was sick. And you said something rather hastily and went off to see."

Sinclair laughed shamefacedly. "Oh I say, that's too bad," he exclaimed. "But where in the world were you? And how do you know?"

Cecil smiled. "It's curious how I remember," she said. "I was on a kaross in the corner all the time, and I was listening because you were telling father about lions in Rhodesia. I'd clean forgotten, but I remember perfectly plainly now."

He nodded. "So I was," he said. "It's a good omen, Miss Eldred. Anyhow I took the farm, six years ago now, and I'm doing quite well. I hope you'll come and see it soon. But I live alone, and it's not much of a place for a lady as it is. Wouldn't you like a trek over into Basutoland? If your father and Gwen came, I could easily arrange it."

"What's that about me?" demanded Gwen, who had waited for them almost concealed by a bank of rushes where the path crossed a tiny feeder of the main stream and ascended to the store on the sky-line.

"Oh, Gwen, you quite scared me!" cried Cecil.

"Yes, you and Hugh seemed mighty thick," said Gwen. "But what were you saying about me, anyhow?"

Sinclair turned to her eagerly: "I was just suggesting that you two might like a trek into Basutoland," he said, "and that if your father brought you to my place, I could get it up."

"How perfectly priceless," cried Gwen. "When, Hugh? Next week?"

The others both laughed. "That's a bit soon for Miss Eldred, I expect," said Hugh. "You'll want to get your luggage up first and settle in, won't you? However, even

next week wouldn't be too soon for me, and anyway we ought not to wait too long or it will be getting cold on the Range by night. The end of April would be perfect—that's a good month."

Cecil nodded. "Yes, I must get my things straight," she said, "and besides we can hardly trek off the moment I am back. Remember mother."

"Bring her, too," interjected Hugh.

"She wouldn't care about it," said Gwen decidedly. "As to your things, Ces, they won't take any time, but certainly you couldn't leave mother all at once. Let's settle the end of April, and switch on to it carefully at home. Hugh, give me another cigarette, there's a dear."

Cecil walked on as the two stopped for Hugh to light her sister's cigarette, but she had sharp ears. "You've never asked *me*," said Gwen, in her low distinct voice. Sinclair made a reply which she could not hear, and the next minute they joined her. Sinclair was a little silent, Cecil thought, but Gwen took up the running.

"There's a crowd at the store," she said. "Several Kaffirs went by while I waited for you, so you'll be able to renew your acquaintance with niggers, Ces. Don't you forget the chocolates, Hugh. Shenks keeps some particularly nice chocolate peppermint creams. I hope you like peppermint, Cecil—at least I'm not sure; perhaps I hope you don't. Then there'll be more for me. There! Didn't I say there was a crowd?"

Their path had led them round a big rondhavel and out to an open space in front of the rough iron building of the store. It was a scene of immense animation and apparent excitement. Under a willow across the yard, a dozen or more horses with bags of grain slung across them were being off-loaded. In the centre, a little to one side of the door and under the projecting iron roof, a white man stood behind a scale with a crowd of natives before him. He had a pencil in his hand and a book, and was noting names and figures in it as a black boy, who weighed the grain, called them out.

A man would stagger up with a sack and sling it on to the scale, and the black assistant would carefully slide along the weight, a dozen pairs of eyes on him. He would call out a name and figure, and the white man would repeat both and add a price which he then wrote on a second slip of paper, tore off and handed to the man. The fellow would stare at it, his black face one huge grin, and perhaps join the expectant crowd to see how his neighbour fared, or perhaps go at once into the store to commence the lengthy job of selecting goods. All the time a babble of sound arose from a miscellaneous crowd of women and children, all talking at once and nineteen to the dozen into the bargain.

Shenk came forward the moment he saw them. "How do you do, Sinclair," he said. "What are you getting for mealies up your way? Finished shearing yet? How do you do, Miss Gwen. Is this your sister? How do you do, Miss Eldred. I heard you were expected back this week, but I didn't expect to see you here so soon. I'm afraid I'm very busy and very dirty. Is it six years since I saw you? I don't think I should have known her, Miss Gwen."

"Probably not," said Gwen. "I'm not sure any of us do. She's the latest London fashion, you know."

Cecil and Shenk laughed, but not Sinclair. The girl's words hurt him somehow. "Well, you're busy, just at the moment, I can see," he said to Shenk. "We'll go in and have a look round. We've some purchases to make."

"Right-ho," said Shenk. "You'll have a cup of tea, Miss Eldred? Masupa!" he shouted, "Masupa!" and then, as a black head appeared round the corner of the store, "Tea!—three cups. Well, if you will excuse me for a moment——" And he went back to the scales.

The three of them entered the store. Round three sides ran a broad counter, and behind the counter, piled up on shelves almost to the roof, were trade goods: all kinds of material, trousers, jackets and blankets—shelves and shelves of blankets; then grocery goods, tinned meat, sardines, candles, matches, beads, small looking-glasses, and a score more

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things. From the roof were hung frames which held saddlery, boots, hats and caps, and umbrellas. On either side of the door were large mirrors, concave and convex respectively, so that in them the reflection of a man was ludicrously comic, either very thin or very fat.

The place was half full of natives, mostly women and children. The women's hair was in many cases greasy and hanging in revolting 'tails' of red ochre and fat, their skin oiled and glossy, their garments often mere rags. Some were examining the 'rugs' of common native wear, however, with the knowledge and criticism of ladies in Bond Street, and others were discussing purchases and exchanging news. Cecil's attention was caught by a group of children, the eldest intent on the purchase of half a bottle of paraffin, some sugar and some matches, the rest eagerly waiting for the gift of half a handful of common sweets that was the *bonne bouche* reserved for the end of every purchase.

"Funny little beggars, aren't they?" said Sinclair behind her.

She turned towards him smiling. "Yes," she said, "but very like children in a village shop at home."

"Not much resemblance in the women though," he said, glancing at them.

Cecil followed his glance with her eyes, and for a moment forgot her companion in a sudden shock of surprise. "Oh!" she exclaimed, "Fanny!"

Over in a corner, laughing and talking with a group of native women, was the half-caste servant-girl. In the house she had seemed to Cecil reserved and far more akin to whites than blacks, but here the situation was reversed. She was on the best of terms with the natives, and at the moment taking a sticky lump of sweet from a black woman's hand. She half turned, too, at the moment, and then Cecil saw, hung in the shawl on her back, a baby, its face staring aimlessly out. Harold flashed into her mind, and what might have been.

A sense almost of physical sickness swept over her. The

heat, the smell of the natives, and the surprise, were more than she could stand. It was almost as if she had been struck a sudden blow, and she went white beneath the shock. Hugh saw her change colour, and in a moment had seized a folding chair from its place by the wall, set it up and placed it for her. "It's the heat," he exclaimed. "I'm so sorry; I ought to have thought of it. Thank goodness, Shenk sent that boy for tea—he won't be many minutes. Can you wait? Or would you like some water?"

Cecil gripped tight hold of herself and smiled mechanically up at him. Time seemed to be standing still and giving her opportunity to think. "It was awfully stupid of me, Mr. Sinclair," she said. "I don't know why I suddenly felt so faint. But I shall be all right in a moment. Oh look, there's the tea. That's all I want."

The boy brought the tea in rough cups, slopped over into their saucers, and the sugar-basin was the scuttle with which the sugar was served from its bin. Shenk came up with apologies, and Cecil threw herself into the fun of the thing, so new to her, and kept both the men about her, laughing, talking and plainly admiring. Out of the corner of her eyes, however, she saw Fanny leave the shop carrying a big can of oil for which she had doubtless been sent from the homestead, and not until the Griqua had had time to get ahead did she suggest a move. Then she and Gwen (munching chocolates) went out of the shop first, while the two men followed, and Cecil was able to speak a word to her sister. She felt curiously hard, as if she could face anything, and Gwen looked up surprised as she said in a low voice: "Thank you, my dear."

Gwen stared at her, and then smiled. "Sorry I swore, Ces," she said. For in the moment of discovery, when Sinclair had gone for the chair, Gwen had whispered savagely, "Don't be a damned fool, Ces."

The sisters did not speak to each other again all the way back or even as they went to their rooms to change for the bathe. Cecil was last down, in a bathing-dress and a

kimono, and carrying a towel, and she found the two others waiting for her on the stoep. Gwen was in a one-piece costume, old, nondescript in colour and patched, without a wrap, swinging a towel and sitting on the rail, her bobbed hair giving her a boyish appearence.

"There you are," she called. "You've been ages. Come on."

"You haven't been any time, really," said Hugh. "Gwen's no guide. She can change quicker than I can."

"She won't when she's my age," laughed Cecil, "and especially not within a week of her return from England. And there's heaps of time."

"You must take a parasol," said Hugh, "if you don't wear a hat." Gwen, bareheaded in the sun, looked back and agreed, and Cecil picked up from the hall a new one from home, of flaming-patterned cretonne. She had braided her black hair, and if she had not known how good she looked as she walked down the path, Sinclair's eyes would have told her.

He discoursed of bathing as they went down, but she hardly listened. His warnings about going out too far, of rocks, of cross-currents and of sharks, hardly reached her. It was Gwen's impatient: "Really, Hugh, you're too fussy by half," that brought her back to present events. By the rocks Hugh put down Cecil's towel which he had carried, saying: "This'll do for you, I think," and went round another to leave his own and his cap. Gwen, who had tossed her towel to the sand and had nothing else at all to discard, looked after him mockingly. "Good Lord," she exclaimed, "poor old Hugh!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Cecil, busy with her shoes.

"Well," said Gwen, "I've bathed about a hundred times with Hugh. We always chuck our towels on the sand together and go in. But to-day, he walks off round a rock, smiling like a mandarin."

"Don't be silly, Gwen," said Cecil, tucking her hair into her cap, and glancing sideways at her.

Gwen met her eyes boldly, but there was no laughter in them. "No," she said, "I won't be."

The sea was much rougher than it had been the day before, and the breakers thundered in, giving no chance to get entirely outside them even if it had been safe. Though without surf-boards, they got the greatest fun out of surfing. You wait just beyond the breaking point of a wave, and, as it picks you up, throw yourself forward into it, hands extended before you and head down. If you are bold enough, it will sweep you right up the beach, the air and water bubbling in your ears and your skin tingling with its power. After a few attempts, Cecil excelled at this. She loved swimming passionately, and had no fear. Her lithe young body shot fearlessly into the wave and seemed to be a mere cork upon it. And the surfing gave her the one moment of the bathe which she never forgot.

Hugh had ridden a wave before her and had not landed when she started. Moreover, unnoticed by either of them, a third came right on the heels of the other two, and not only was Cecil carried forward blindly so that she was on top of Hugh before she knew it, but also, as they laughingly tried to recover their footing, this third rushed upon them. Both were bowled clean over. Cecil clutched Hugh desperately, her body pressed to his, and Hugh flung his right arm across her breast to hold her. She was for a moment in the closest embrace, and even in the roar and surge of the sea, the physical joy of it thrilled her. All her femininity, long suppressed or controlled, asserted itself. Spluttering and laughing, the two of them staggered up the beach together, Cecil intoxicated without knowing why. "Oh," she exclaimed, throwing out her arms to the breeze and sun and gazing at him through the film of salt-water that still streamed down her face, "how divine! I feel like a Greek goddess. Oh. what a thing it is to be alive!"

"You look like one too," said Hugh, openly admiring her.

"Don't," laughed Cecil. "It's impossible to live up to it, you know."

The night was a fitting climax to the day. After a late tea, they all of them—Mr. Eldred, Cecil, Len, Gwen and Sinclair—tramped off to the boat, Gwen carrying the grains, or three-pronged fish-spear, and Len the lantern, a patent arrangement which gave a brilliant light with paraffin gas and was perfection for the operations, except that it needed a good deal of paraphernalia in the shape of a bottle of spirits, a sort of brush for lighting purposes, and a pump. They walked along the beach barefoot on the wet sands, with the spume of the waves warm beneath their feet and the stars glowing over sea and land and on the wet surface before them. The launch in the river was a mysterious business, Cecil thought, standing back to let the men and Gwen (in shorts, a diminutive skirt and a sweater) do the work. Then she took the tiller, her father sitting by her. Len pulled. Gwen lay full length in the bows, holding the lantern so shielded that its light illuminated the water but did not shine on the figure of Sinclair standing above her, the spear poised in his arms. Slowly and silently, Len pulled up the broad stream. The cry of an owl from the banks or the leap of a fish somewhere higher up alone broke a silence that did not seem disturbed by the ceaseless distant roar of the sea on the bar. Stars above and below, they seemed to float in a velvet dark between heaven and earth.

"There's one!" exclaimed her father in a sibilant whisper.

"Oh where?" she breathed.

"Sorry; too late," said Hugh. "Watch the left, Miss Eldred."

Another long minute, and then almost magically as it seemed to her, two long silvery fish swam into the bright light, all but charging the bows of the boat, and simultaneously Hugh dived the spear at them. "Got one," he shouted, eagerly, and pulled in the heavy weapon by the line

attached to his wrist. Len leant back and detached the fish, dropping it to flap feebly in the boat at his feet.

After a while, Cecil took her sister's place, and Len the grains. With all his skill, he was less successful than Hugh, but it seemed they were, if anything, too high up the river by now. Cecil felt she would not have cared if no more fish had been seen, for they had plenty, and it was enchanting to lie there so near the water and gaze deep into its lit depths, seeing weed swaying with the current, and tiny fish, and now and again the bigger mullet. However they turned and her father took the spear, she and Hugh sitting together on the rudder-seat. And near the bar, its thunder in her ears, she almost started as Sinclair laid his hand on her arm. "Look," he said; "over there, to the right."

She half turned and looked.

"Oh," she gasped, "how marvellous!"

The African moon was sailing into view over the kopjes on the Pondoland side. While they watched, the serene light flooded the trees on the opposite bank and fell on the placid river, save where the great shadows rested, in one of which they lay. Out to sea, it fell on the spray and shone in a luminous mist. And even while they watched, their boat glided out of the darkness into that silver light, and Hugh took his hand from her arm.

"That's all," said Mr. Eldred. "We shan't catch more to-night. Pull in, Len. Well, Cecil, enjoyed it?"

She nodded, almost afraid to speak lest she should shatter a dream.

CHAPTER IV

CECIL was not as yet given to introspection, but she was getting into the bad habit. This morning, with Hugh Sinclair (whose stay had been prolonged a week) three days gone, she was lying in a hammock which he had hung for her, and pretending to read. Hugh had chosen a place on the edge of the pine plantation, sufficiently far from the house to be out of the sound of ordinary doings there, and yet within call. The trees murmured above her, their thin needles rustling gently together as if they whispered of days in far Madagascar, and she lay well within their shadow. Yet the view lay uninterrupted below her. She could see the busy little stream tumbling angrily among the great rocks of its course to the sea, the bluff beyond, and the line of breakers framed between its bold outline and the bush across the lagoon. On the sea, there was not a sail in sight, but two or three naked native children were bathing in the shallow water of the lagoon itself.

Cecil was very far from thinking busily, indeed she was perhaps hardly aware that she thought at all. If she had realised exactly upon what her thoughts were dwelling, she might have been disconcerted, but it was characteristic of her in those days that she did no such thing. So a flower opens to the sun, it must be supposed, without conscious thought, every sensitive cell of it, however, responding to the warmth and light. Cecil, then, was aware that a fortnight ago she had been a school-girl eagerly anticipating home, but that now she was a school-girl no more at all and that her home was already a secondary matter. She was lazily reviewing the doings of the week, and it was Hugh always who stood out in them. Now she was bumping into him by the camp-

fire, and at that she smiled to herself. Then they were rowing up the river, and she was watching his firm strokes against the sunny water. Or again they were walking to the store, riding together, sitting on the stoep in the evening, choosing the place for this hammock, waving good-bye to him in the motor. She was not even sorry that he had gone. She seemed to have so many memories of him that it was almost as if he had not gone. Also he was near, and they would soon meet again. She was very sure they would; not meet, that is, as one met other people, but meet soon to resume the friendship that was already established between them.

It was at this point that her thinking became less definite than before. She did not ask herself if she were in love with him, for the simple reason that she had never loved anybody, other than her own people, and had as it were no test possible. She honestly did not yet know what love was. She had, of course, read novels and talked of it to girls to some extent, but never seriously. Love and marriage were simply one thing to her, and a simple matter at that. You fell in love and you married, that was all. Why you married, necessarily, because you were in love, did not present itself as a subject of definite thought at all. And Cecil was not a fool in all this, but merely a very jolly simple girl who had lived for nineteen years without ever looking on life. She had come from a school in reality more secluded than a convent to find herself suddenly a woman admired and admiring. The very gay robustness of her school-days made the contrast more startling. At "The Lindens" there was, for well or ill, no time to think of such things. Even the mere sight of nuns and the vigilance of a convent might make one wonder what it was all for, but at "The Lindens" there was nothing to wonder about.

Just then Gwen passed below her, taking the path to the fruit garden across the spruit. Gwen did not see her and was walking slowly, swinging a basket. Cecil lazily contemplated her, and then a little frown gathered at the corners of

her eyes. She wondered how Gwen would like "The Lindens." She had liked it, but she was suddenly aware how intensely she would dislike going back. But what about Gwen? It was rather like caging a wild bird, Cecil thought. But why did she think of Gwen as a wild bird? Just because she roamed at large and did lessons more or less when she wanted to do them? No, it was not quite that. It was all rather puzzling.

Hugh. Gwen. Cecil set them both before her. If Gwen had not known Hugh, she might have liked "The Lindens." But she did know Hugh, and Cecil was not even sure how much she knew him. It was utterly ridiculous, of course, a mere girl and a man of thirty, but then Gwen was so old for her years. Did Gwen love Hugh?

Cecil became aware that her world stood still at the thought. But after all, why should she not? Or why should she? A marriage between them struck her as absurd, and if no marriage was in the question, then where did love come in? And then, like an arrow that struck her entirely unawares, she had another remembrance. She all but felt the surf boiling and thundering about her, and the clasp of Hugh's arm—its touch across her breast. The colour flooded her face, and she half sat up to pull at a cushion. "How perfectly absurd," she said aloud.

As if in immediate reply, a low chuckle of a laugh sounded behind her. "Oh!" she exclaimed, startled, and turned swiftly to see who had thus come upon her unawares. And it was thus that Cecil Eldred and Pamela Urfurd came face to face. The high gods arranged it so.

Cecil saw a girl not much more than her own age. (Pamela was, in fact, two years older.) She wore riding breeches and a long covert coat, and her light brown rather nondescript hair was gathered in a thick short queue and tied up with a black ribbon. She wore a soft plain hat, and held a sjambok in one hand and a pair of gloves in the other. Her best friends never called Pamela pretty, but equally her enemies (of which she had more than her share as life went

on, especially among women) never called her plain. It was not beauty or the lack of it that you thought of when you looked at Pamela Urfurd. On the whole, women tended to be immediately and instinctively hostile, while most men were instantly attracted. Her nose was too big, and had an emphatic and undeniable hook in it. As for her eyes, one rarely saw them fully open. They looked at you provocatively, and you called them brown. But if ever you saw them really open, you knew them to be grey. Women said they were hard, but no man ever saw anything hard in them. If there was a hardness in them, it lay behind, and men were no longer reasonable creatures when they penetrated so far.

Pamela and Cecil were destined to be great friends, which as a rule surprised their mutual acquaintances beyond words. Also Pamela loved Cecil and loved her almost at once, which surprised them still more.

At the moment, however, all these things lay on the lap of the gods. Cecil was merely aware that someone she did not know from Adam—or Eve—had surprised her at an awkward moment, and that someone a curious person who made no apologies whatever. Instead she laughed again, and stepped forward, but making no motion to shake hands.

"I love to surprise somebody smashing at a pillow and talking aloud," she said. "It is an exposure of our common and frail humanity. Do hit it again if you feel like it, unless you prefer to hit me. I'm Pamela Urfurd by the way. I'd have been over before this, but I was in Durban and we only got back yesterday. But as you had Hugh Sinclair, I daresay it was as well I was there."

Cecil ransacked her memories of the drawing-room at "The Lindens" for a guide as to how to treat such a visitor, but she found none. So she said, feebly: "How do you do? You are Gwen's friend, are you not? I'm so glad you've called."

"I don't know that I'm Gwen's *friend*," said Pamela, looking round for a comfortable spot, and seating herself, "but I'm her nearest neighbour unmarried and in skirts. We're

quite good pals, however. Of course I like her very much, but she is so extraordinarily childish. I'm very glad you've come home."

"I've been thinking how grown-up she is," said Cecil.

Pamela's eyes narrowed still more, and from under the half-closed lids she regarded Cecil in silence for a second. "Oh do you," she said, as if that explained a good deal. "She seems to me merely an amazingly natural kind of animal. I'm afraid you may think it rude, as she's your sister, but she always reminds me of a native. People say you can't tell what a native is going to do, but of course that is absurd. You can tell even better than you can what a child or a beast will do. So long as a child is a child, it may always surprise you. All its characteristics have not arisen from the depths. As for an animal, it is not always easy to know what their instinct will teach them to do in an emergency. But a native is like a child for whom the day of surprises is past and yet it has not ceased to be a child, and like an animal whose instincts have been sufficiently long under observation to be known. You can control both with this." And she slashed lightly at the ground with her sjambok as she spoke.

Cecil was so interested that she entirely forgot to be surprised that such should be their conversation within a few seconds of their first meeting. "Do you really understand natives?" she said.

That was not in the least what she literally meant to say, but Pamela characteristically answered her thoughts. "You don't understand them because you are just from England and from school," she said. "I don't wonder. I was at a school in England just nine months, and then I left. I had to. I should have gone mad there. The English girls' school system strikes me as one of the most diabolically clever institutions conceivable. Don't you think it is?"

Cecil laughed heartily. "No," she said, "I can't say I ever thought that. I enjoyed myself immensely—in a way. Now, though, I'm beginning to be very glad it's over. I don't want to go back, you know."

"I should think not," said Pamela. "I imagine that a girls' school has a great deal in common with a private lunatic asylum where all the attendants are most kind, and everything is very nice, and the inmates are all but allowed to do what they like; but for all that, there are bolts and bars, and every influence is being brought to bear to change the essential characteristic madnesses of the patients into the normal madness of the world. A girls' school, such as you and I went to, is to prepare her for a civilised and if possible domestic existence. If she can be brought to the present standard of manners, developed as perfectly as possible (so long as her sexual development is not developed too) and then turned out, blind to half the passions of the world and ignorant of all its vices, to marry a nice young man as quickly as possible and have a sufficiency of babies (with medical assistance) and never grow discontented with 'home life,' then the ideal is attained. Hence a little French and German, a smattering of history and geography and arithmetic, music, gymnasium and games—all nice and merry and busy and clean all the time—that is your school. They say if you shut a sane person up in a lunatic asylum, he goes insane too. So I should have gone insane. But I came away in time, thank God. Father never refuses me anything, and mother's dead you know. She died when I was a baby. I'm sorry sometimes, but then sometimes I'm glad. She was English, and I think she would have been conventional and have hated me."

Cecil gasped. She always imagined that when girls' mothers died in their daughters' babyhood, they took on the proportion of saints. Pamela's conclusion seemed to her even more amazing than the rest of her speech, and that was saying a good deal. And the stream of it took away any breath she had left.

"I shock you," said Pamela. "I shan't say I'm sorry, for I'm not, but I hope it won't put you off me. I've really been looking forward to your coming most awfully. It's true I prefer men to women any day, but we haven't even got many men about here. I think Shenk is as good as any, but he

thinks I'm possessed of a devil, which he much admires but secretly fears. Or perhaps he fears father. But anyway he fears. And you can't be real friends with a person who is afraid."

"What do you think of Hugh Sinclair?" asked Cecil, ignoring this remarkable statement; and she was still able to ask the question with the utmost naturalness. Or so she thought, and so probably would anyone else have thought. But Pamela is not like anyone else.

She looked at Cecil as she sat there in her hammock, and took her in from the crown of her black hair to the soles of her brown brogues. Then she smiled, with a sideways glance of her eyes (which was a trick of hers) and said:

"You and I will never quarrel over Hugh, Cecily. I shall call you Cecily, by the way. It's prettier than Cecil, and 'Ces' is too awful."

Cecil was somehow pleased at this, and she smiled back at her. "Do," she said. "I like 'Cecily' too. But I don't understand you about Mr. Sinclair. Why should we quarrel over him—or anyone, for the matter of that?"

Pamela thrust her hand into the breast pocket of her coat and produced a cigarette case. She opened it and made a motion to offer it to the girl above her, but Cecil shook her head. So she selected a cigarette herself, shut the case with a snap, and thoughtfully tapped the oval white thing on the silver. She put it to her lips with extreme deliberation, found a match, struck it on her boot, and lit her cigarette. She took two or three sharp pulls at it, and then gazed carefully at the glowing end. Then she put it again between her lips and drew in a great volume of smoke, leaning back on both her hands and staring up again at Cecil through the cloud that slowly escaped from her mouth and nose. Simple as it all was, with Pamela the business had the air of an incantation. Cecil had wit enough to perceive it.

She burst out laughing. "You look like a sibyl behind the fires of divination!" she said.

Pamela ignored this. "We shall not quarrel over Hugh,

Cecily," she continued, "because although I expect he will fall in love with you and you with him—and quite probably you have both begun to do so already—I am not in love with him at all, and he will not now see anything in me. Except that he will probably dislike your knowing me, it will not matter. And though I tell you not to marry him, it will probably make no difference: I expect that you will marry him all the same. But I am not a witch, worse luck. I cannot see hidden things. Wherefore, I say we shall not quarrel over *Hugh*."

She spoke fairly quickly, but it seemed to Cecil as if her words took a long time. She had at first flushed, and then lost her colour, and then felt almost frightened. Despite the other's disclaimer, Cecil thought her almost fey. It was as if she had been playing among flowers and suddenly seen a skeleton in the grass. She was at any rate aware that if Pamela had been reading all her thoughts all the morning and then had suddenly shown her whither they inevitably led, she could not have spoken more truly. And yet the words had in them a revelation of the future of which she felt totally unsure.

"How can you know?" she whispered.

Pamela flicked the ash off her cigarette as coolly as possible. "I expect that I was a fool to say that," she said, "but then you and I are going to be friends, Cecily, and one doesn't hide one's thoughts from friends. My dear, it is all as plain as plain can be. You are exactly the sort of girl that Hugh Sinclair will love. You are the sort of girl that the schools want men like Hugh to love and that they manufacture for them. He will love your innocence, your ignorance, your daintiness. You will love his breeding that persists despite the life he has led, and he will seem to you a very proper man. And there aren't many about here, you know. Besides, you will suddenly feel the pull of nature and turn to him instinctively. He will probably tell you all his sins, in the end, and you will weep and forgive him. You will not tell him any of your sins, for you will not have had

any worth speaking about—then. And you will breed babies for him, very content. It is written. Only what it will be in the end thereof, I do not know. I am not old enough to guess; and not possessing second sight, as I say, I cannot see. But that is why I say we shall not quarrel over Hugh."

Cecil had a mad impulse to run away. She jumped out of the hammock and stooped to pick up her book that had fallen to the ground. As she stooped, she met Pamela's eyes watching her and knew that she was arrested, though it was imperceptible. Instead, therefore, she did the very opposite. She gave a little sigh and threw herself down by the other girl's side. "Do go on," she said softly. And wondered why she had said it.

Pamela had not moved, and she continued for a while to smoke in silence. When she spoke again it was almost to herself.

"I wonder, sometimes, what it is all for," she said. "According to the Bible, man needed a help-meet, and God found him one. He gave him Eve. But Eve was no help-meet to Adam, even in the Bible, except perhaps outside of Paradise, where she cooked for him, and slaved, I suppose, and probably herself invented something more durable than fig-leaves. Which always looks to me as if God knew that Paradise would not last long. But she was not nearly so much his companion as his wife. 'He called her name Eve, because she was the Mother of all living.' That rings true, anyway. She mothered his babies; that's what concerned Adam most. And doubtless she was admirably fitted to do it. Even her body was made distinctly inconvenient for any other purpose. But what's the good of living? We were talking just now of the Kaffirs, and really white people are not so different from the Kaffirs as they like to think. Now you would have thought that the Kaffirs would long since have gone on strike against living. On our farms, they work more or less, in their own way, from morning to night, unless they are too tired or it's too cold. They work for us, and when they have done working for us, they work in their own lands for their own

food. We give them a sack or two to wear—to save time that they would otherwise spend sewing fig-leaves or their substitutes together, I sometimes think. Occasionally they save enough to get drunk, but not often. And when they are old, they still do odd jobs or sit about in their huts or in the sun, waiting to die. Why, then, should they want to live? And yet every woman among them wants babies, and they breed like rabbits—breed babies for the same ends as their own. And we white people, we are little better. We have invented motor-cars and aeroplanes, new foods and drinks, new sins if not new passions, and all that we use is a hundred times more elaborate and a thousand times more boring to manufacture than theirs. But what's the end of it all? Father says 'the race must not die out,' but I'm damned if I see why not."

Cecil sat on and said nothing.

"Have you ever heard of Lilith?" demanded Pamela suddenly. She wisely took it for granted that the other had not, and went on. "Lilith was Adam's first wife, half woman, half angel,—or devil, I don't know which. It would not have mattered much to Adam, I expect. She was all that Eve was not. She was dark and Eve was fair. She preferred to talk to Adam of good and evil rather than marry him. She would never have been the Mother of all living. God saw that she would spoil His purpose, I suppose. If she had babies, they must have been queer little devils, I should think. She bewitched Adam, but Eve had the best of it in the end. Looking at Eve he preferred her huts and her babies, even with the tilling of the weeds in the sweat of his brow, to Lilith's enchantments. It was curious, I think, but true. And you, Cecily, ought to have had fair hair—even mine, and I ought to have had yours." And she laughed, her rare laugh that was more a chuckle than a laugh.

"What happened to Lilith?" queried Cecil, breathlessly.

Pamela looked at her closely, and laughed again. "Oh, I don't know," she said. "According to the Arabs, she wandered into Africa and died somewhere near Kilimanjaro.

There's a cave there that the natives call after her to this day, so I read somewhere. I should think Africa is merely a euphemism for the outer darkness myself. But it is all rubbish, my dear, or anyway that part of it is not in the Bible and I'm sure you need only concern yourself with what is. That is all Hugh will want, anyway."

Cecil moved restlessly, and Pamela got out another cigarette which she lit from the stub of the old one without any ritual. If Cecil had known her better she would have guessed that the 'sitting' was over. But instead she looked away over the sea. "You frighten me," she said. "You've made me feel as if I can't ever meet Hugh again."

"That is entirely unnecessary," said Pamela. "And useless."

Cecil started and looked round.

"Oh no," went on the other coolly. "He's not now coming through the pines, at least not in his bodily presence. Doubtless he is in spirit, and doubtless he will one day, but not just yet. He hasn't been to a girls' school, Cecily, but he is as conventional as if he had. You'll meet him once and again, yet, my dear, and then he'll propose beautifully. And you'll go off together and gather apples in the garden. Then will the voice of the Lord God speak to you both in the cool of the evening."

Somehow or another Cecil recovered herself at this.

"Do you know," said she, "I don't really understand half the things you say, but I tell you frankly, I wish you wouldn't talk like that of—of Mr. Sinclair. All that you have been saying about us is of course nonsense, but I hope to goodness you won't talk like that to Gwen or anybody else. I'm sure I don't know why ever I let you say such things to me."

"Cecily, my dear," said Pamela, "when you talk like that I feel more sure than ever that we are going to be friends. At first you'll have to learn to take me on trust, so to speak, because I can't break myself in to people whom I know I shall like. But the first trust is this, that you can be quite

sure I shan't talk so to anyone, least of all to Gwen. Gwen is—well, Gwen is Gwen."

"That's no definition," said Cecil curiously. "What is Gwen? Do tell me."

Pamela got slowly to her feet, and Cecil had a revelation of her surprising strength and grace. She rose without touching the ground, but not in the least as if she were performing a gymnastic feat. "Gwen," she said, brushing her riding-breeches with her sjambok, "is what they call a healthy girl. She's run wild out here, of course, but that is all she is really. What she will be one day, the Lord Who made her alone knows, even if He does, which I doubt. Probably you find her very different from your school-friends, but that's only environment. She is a girl still. You, my dear, are a woman. You've turned the corner without knowing it."

"I believe you've turned it for me this morning," said Cecil, looking up at her from the ground.

Pamela half started and turned round, catching sight of Gwen as she came back up the hill. "There's more in that than I guessed, my dear, I think," she said. "But I perceive the little sister to be advancing upon us."

Cecil got up hastily, feeling, she hardly knew why, as if she did not want to be surprised there. But if she were a little perturbed, her companion was not.

"Gwen!" called Pamela, "Gwen!"

The girl left the path and made for them. "Hullo!" she said to Pamela, "you're here, are you? How's Durban? Been hobnobbing with Ces?"

"Yes. They told me you'd gone to the garden this way, and I came to look for you and found your sister. She's been telling me all about 'The Lindens' and her doings in England, and I've told her that she will be a priceless possession in these desert places. Do give me a banana, if there's one ripe. Or better still an orange. Cecil, you never get oranges like this in England, do you? I remember trying to

buy a pineapple for a penny when I was there, and being sure the shop-keeper was trying to rag me when he said it was five shillings."

The three of them wandered up the garden-path, and at the door beheld Pamela's horse still girthed up tightly, his reins held by a piccaninny in a loin-cloth. Pamela's face flushed. "You little fool," she said, "why didn't you off-saddle, or at least loosen the girth? Here, get out," and she slapped him across the thighs with her sjambok.

The boy started back with a little cry. "Missus didn't say," he said.

"No, Missus didn't, but Missus thought you would have some common-sense,—which was stupid of her, I'll admit," retorted Pamela. "Well, it's too late now anyway. We'll canter home, old dear," she added, patting her horse's neck. "I suppose you ride, Cecily?"

"Oh rather," said Cecil, "but of course I'm a bit out of practice. I hardly rode at all in England, though I've been out most days since I got back."

"Good," said Pamela. "Gwen, darling, do both of you come over sometime soon. Come to-morrow if you've nothing better to do." And she vaulted lightly into the saddle.

"Must you go?" said Gwen. "Can't you stay to lunch?"

"No thanks, I really can't. I told dad I'd be back, and I shall be late as it is. Gee-up, old boy. Ta-ta, both of you. And don't forget to visit us."

She put her pony to a canter, and rode quickly off. The sisters watched her cross the yard, slow down through the gate, and quicken up on the veld. She did not look behind. Pamela rarely did.

"What do you think of her, Ces?" demanded Gwen.

"I think we shall get on well," answered Cecil slowly. "But she's a queer girl."

Gwen considered this a moment in silence. Then she said:

"She is. She's a bit too queer for me, I think. She looks right through you, for one thing. I heard Shenk tell Len that he reckoned she had the devil of a temper, and I guess

he's right. Look how she struck Mafolo. But then she loves her damned horses more than her father or anyone, and almost more than herself, I think."

"Gwen," said Cecil, "you shouldn't swear. It's a bad habit."

"Maybe," retorted Gwen, "but so has Pamela bad habits. And yet it's not her habits that I mind so much. It's her character I don't like, I think."

Cecil smiled light-heartedly. "Gwen," she said, "you're becoming a philosopher! What characteristic displeases you especially, eh?"

Gwen shrugged her shoulders. "I shall swear again probably," she said comically.

Cecil laughed outright. "Well, you shall for once then," she said.

"She's so damned ruthless," Gwen answered instantly.

Cecil stood for a moment staring at her. Then she took her sister's arm without another word, and the two entered the house.

CHAPTER V

TEN miles or so inland from its mouth, the Umtamvuna rushes through a deep gorge choked with rocks, and makes there the rapids which hinder farther ascent in a boat. A mile or so above them, the waters open out into a small and more or less placid stream, and here, high up on the slope of a hill, stands Three Springs. For the most part, bush and plantations of trees make thick cover between it and the river, and indeed the farm is almost hidden in tangled woods. There are lands and pastures behind, however, and the view from the stoep is magnificent, for you can see an open reach of the river, although a curve hides its mouth, and the sea beyond; but as you ride to it from Elandskop, you appear to be losing yourself in semi-tropical forest rather than approaching cultivated ground.

Cecil riding there with Gwen, old Jacob in attendance, a week or so later, thought so, at any rate. "Are you sure this is right, Gwen?" she asked. "This track looks as if a carriage never passed over it, and we must have come miles now."

"Yes, it's right," said Gwen, flicking at the overhanging boughs of trees with her whip. "Still I admit you might not think so. And besides, a carriage hardly ever does come this way. If Mr. Urfurd goes out at all, which is not often, he drives a two-seater as if he were out for a race."

"What, on this path?" demanded Cecil.

"Oh no. There's a way out to the main road, behind the house, and through the lands. You'll see when we get there. Mr. Urfurd motors that way. He never troubles about this. *I* think it's because he doesn't want visitors, for of course this is by far the nearest way from Harding and the Shep-

stone road. So he lets the place get overgrown as a polite way of saying that he's not at home to callers. Even Pam doesn't very often come down. Either she motors with Mr. Urfurd, or else she wanders off into Pondoland across the river. She loves natives. She talks about five or six of their languages, you know, and never seems the least afraid of going among the villages alone at all hours. Yet you remember how she hit Mafolo; well, she treats them all like that. Daddy says she'll get into trouble one day, and he can't understand why Mr. Urfurd allows her to go out so much by herself. But then daddy doesn't understand Mr. Urfurd."

"You sound as if you did," said Cecil, amused.

"Well, I think I do," replied her sister. "Daddy's keen on his farm and on us, but Mr. Urfurd cares for nothing except his books. He lives in his library, and really he hardly farms at all. He was here before most of us, too, you know; indeed I think he is bored now because we've all crept nearer and nearer to him. Still he's quite nice when you meet him—not a bit of a mystery, like I used to hope he would be. But he doesn't worry about anything, or care about anything. He and Pam are a good deal alike. Pam wants to go about, and she goes; he doesn't, and he stops at home. And that's the end of it."

"Who does the housekeeping for this extraordinary family?" asked Cecil.

"Oh Pam, of course. In a way she's awfully clever at it. They've got an old Hottentot woman for a cook—Auntie Tot, they call her, and she gives me the creeps; but she can cook. Pam orders things and she cooks them. I like the house too. I'm sure Mr. Urfurd never cares a scrap if it's clean or dirty, pretty or not, but Pam does. She bosses up the boys, and though it's very quaint, it's nice. They must have plenty of money, for they don't make it out of the farm."

"You make me quite keen to get there. How much further is it?"

"Let's canter, then; we can here. As a matter of fact, the house is *there*"—and Gwen pointed with her whip at right angles to the path and into a wall of vegetation—"but you can't see it. It's on a knob of rock. We have to skirt in front of it, and then come at it from the river side. Come on." And she put her horse to the canter.

Cecil followed more slowly. It was stifling hot under the trees and she was glad of the breeze from the motion; it was queerly silent, too, at mid-day, and the noise of the horses' hoofs on the leaves and sticks beneath them was pleasant. Gwen was soon fifty yards in front and presently swung round a corner out of sight. When Cecil reached the place, she saw that here they left the forest almost as if riding out of a tunnel, and that before her, bright in the sunlight, lay a rough hill-side. Out on to this she rode, looking for Gwen, and heard a shout on her right. Then she reined up a minute in astonishment.

The path wound up an incline at the top of which was the house. Seen from here, it appeared to lie in an enclosure of forest only open on this side, where, a few yards from a raised stoep, a dozen steps had been cut in the rock to reach the track below. Yet those few yards were a blaze of colour, and masses of yellow creeper crept up the pillars of the stoep. The track itself divided at the corner of the rock and Gwen was already dismounting. Below her, Cecil could see that the rolling slope ran down to the river, and skirted the forest. But she hardly turned to see, giving her reins a little shake and riding up to her sister.

Here Jacob took the bridles and set about loosening girths. The sisters made their way to the steps and mounted them. On the stoep itself Gwen turned. "What do you think of that?" she demanded.

It was, indeed, a wonderful situation. Over the heads of waving forest-trees, one looked to the shining reach of the river below the rapids with the sea beyond. On the left, in the direction of Harding and Elandskop, there was nothing but a wall of forest. To the right, the hillside

sloped to the river and there was an uninterrupted view right out and across it into Pondoland. There, rolling hills and valleys hid the native villages for the most part, but allowed you to look far across them to a blue and distant range.

There was no one apparently about. Gwen crossed the stoep familiarly enough, and entered French doors that stood wide open, but there was no one there either. "I'll go and look for someone," she said, and walked across the room to a door through which she disappeared.

Cecil threw herself into an easy chair and looked about her. The room was not unlike the lounge-hall of some big house at home, and was much better furnished than the majority of colonial houses. There was a fire-place, for it could be cold up here in winter, but it was a huge open-tiled place in which one could sit, with logs in a wrought-iron brazier, and wrought fire-irons in a corner. There was a carved oak mantel-shelf quite bare except for a great blue bowl of white roses, and above it a solitary portrait of Pamela as a girl of five or six. It was a full-length portrait, and she was standing, steadily gazing at you, a curious look on the child-face. Cecil could not make out the expression and got up to see. The eyes seemed to follow her, knowingly, and as if they were a little surprised at her. There was a suggestion of a frown in them and Cecil thought that the picture was more remarkable than pleasing. She turned from it and surveyed the room. It was long and lofty, with great doors at the farther end giving on another stoep. The floor was of stone, though a profusion of skins gave it a warm appearance, and there were a number of immense and easy chairs about, with two or three firm-looking little tables strewn with books and magazines and vases of flowers. Rather nearer to her than in the centre was an oval oak gate-legged table, bare except for a great hammered metal rose-bowl full of more roses, but red this time. The walls were panelled, and carried little other than candlesticks and a hunting trophy or two. In a far corner on a

pedestal was a marble figure, and Cecil walked over to see it. It was a copy of Dillon's "Grief" from Brussels, though she did not know it. But the pathetic hopeless sorrow of the kneeling girlish figure, and the strewn petals of the flower she held, brought momentary tears to Cecil's eyes. Here was no abandonment to grief, but only empty helpless despair and stricken listlessness.

The sound of steps on the stoep made her turn round. It was Gwen. "I can't find anyone," she announced. "Auntie Tot is bringing tea, though, and she says she thinks Pam went down to the river. Mr. Urfurd is out—he's motored into Harding, she says. What do you think of this room?"

"I like it," said Cecil.

"I'm not sure that I do," said Gwen. "It gives me the creeps somehow. It's not quite human. There isn't a photograph about, and the people who use it apparently never do anything but read or smoke. I may as well do that anyhow." And she walked to a little table on which stood a silver cigarette box, and helped herself.

Cecil laughed. "It's certainly not your room or mine," she said, "but for all that I like it. It must be a big house, Gwen."

"It is. Mr. Urfurd's study is pretty well as big as this. Come and see."

"Oh, we mustn't," protested Cecil. "Suppose Pamela comes back."

"She's not likely to, and if she does, it won't matter. We can say we were looking for her. Come on."

She led the way out by the door opposite the central stoep, and Cecil followed her. They found themselves in a passage which ran the length of the house. Gwen pointed to the right. "Drawing-room there," she said *sotto voce;* "hardly ever used," and turned to the left. A door farther down stood closed, and she opened it and peeped in. "No one visible," she said, and went in. Cecil followed.

It was, indeed, a library. One great bay window gave a view over the forest and by means of skilful felling here and there, a glimpse of the sea had been obtained. Isolated in it, stood a desk littered with papers. The walls were simply covered with books from floor to ceiling, and Cecil glanced at those nearest to her. They were all travel books here, and books on native life and folk-lore, while above the shelves was a bronze at which she stepped back to look. It represented a native—a Zulu—dying after a fight, and was amazingly well done. His broken assegai lay beside him, and on his left arm was still his shield. His right hand clasped his side and between the spread fingers gaped a wound. Another assegai stood as if quivering yet in the ground by him, but he did not heed it. He was too intent on dying to mind that any more.

"Beastly, isn't it?" said Gwen, who had come over to her.

"It's not cheerful, certainly," said Cecil, "but I shouldn't call it beastly. It's a fine work of art, Gwen. As you say, the Urfurds must be rich."

"Well, let's get back; the tea'll be coming. This is where Mr. Urfurd lives. He's writing a book, people say, but I don't know. He moons about and reads, I think; I don't believe he writes much. I'd like to look at his papers, but that wouldn't be fair, would it? Come on."

They went out together, Cecil giving a backward glance and taking in the rich carpet and the general snug appearance of the room. It impressed her rather, and she began to wish Mr. Urfurd had not been out. But back in the lounge, Auntie Tot was bringing in the tea, and she wanted that more than anything at the moment.

Auntie Tot was a curious little wizened body with very sharp beady eyes. She looked Cecil up and down and nodded approvingly, but so openly that Cecil laughed. The old woman smiled back at her, but she did not speak. But it seemed to Cecil as if something ought to be said. "Good-morning," she said, "and thank you so much for the tea. I

did want it, after our ride. Did Miss Pamela say what time she would be back? Or Mr. Urfurd? We are sorry to miss them both."

"No, Missus," said the old woman. "Miss Pamela, she be in to lunch, I know, but I don't think before. Won't you off-saddle? Missus will be angry if she finds you have gone."

Cecil looked irresolutely at Gwen. "What do you think?" she asked.

"I don't see why not," said Gwen. "I like an hour or two here; there's so much to see. Yes, let's wait. Right-ho, Auntie Tot, we'll stay." And she picked up a *Bystander* and threw herself into a big chair.

Cecil turned to the old servant. "Well, thank you," she said smiling, "we'll stay. Will you tell Jacob—our boy—to off-saddle? He went round to the back with the horses."

She walked over to the table and poured out some tea, taking a cup to Gwen, and her own out to the stoep. It was delicious there. A cool breeze blew up from the sea and the far-away distant mountains looked lovely. Cecil gave herself up to dreams of them, wondering what they would be like if one were there, and imagining the native villages on the slopes and the hidden native life. Within, Gwen moved restlessly about, glancing quickly through magazines and throwing them down when done with, taking another cigarette and some more tea. At last Cecil got slowly to her feet, and wandered off into the scrap of garden before the house. She saw that it was cleverly contrived in the very rock on which the house stood, for the beds had been blasted out and then filled with earth and flowers. Still idly, she descended the steps and made her slow way towards the river, vaguely wondering if she might not meet Pamela.

The path she was on led her by many a twist and turn to avoid great boulders, but it was plainly marked and smooth. Cecil had followed it for perhaps half a mile when she found that it had brought her to a rather queer place

before which it appeared almost to hesitate before it made a turn and wound on down to the river. The ground had fallen in in a kind of hollow overhung by huge rocks, in the crevices of which grew young poplars which shivered their silver leaves in the sun and breeze. Bushes growing thickly nearer the path served to screen the place still more, and there was one splash of colour there, for a big bunch of crimson aloes grew half way up the little amphitheatre. Partly meaning to see if she could reach them, and partly wishful to explore the spot which looked curiously attractive to her, Cecil took a step or two off the path and down into the hollow, her foot-falls quite silent on the soft ground. But she had hardly left it, when the sound of a voice arrested her.

It was that of Pamela. She was speaking in short sentences, and though Cecil listened, she could make nothing of them. Then it struck her that the girl was speaking in some native tongue, and, scarcely thinking what she did, she walked quickly forward between the bushes and round a fallen rock. Then she stood arrested, as she well might have been.

There was no cave, but there was an enclosed rough circle of grass and sand, overhung and shaded at the farther end by rocks and poplars, and well veiled by the bushes from the path. Almost under the rocks themselves crouched three figures, and at these Cecil gazed half-terrified. The first, sideways on to her, was an old native man, wizened and grey, a kaross of sheepskin thrown over his shoulders, who leaned forward on his hands between which, on a swept surface of sand, gleamed some white knuckle-bones; the second, facing her, was a native girl, sitting back against a rock, her eyes wide open and staring at Cecil, but, as she saw at once, not seeing her; and the third, also sitting, back to her and facing the native girl, was Pamela. And Pamela was speaking in short sharp sentences, and occasionally moving her hands across the girl's face.

As Cecil watched, she ceased to speak, and the native

girl began instead, but speaking steadily in a low monotonous voice and without a movement. The other two listened intently. Cecil, partly interested and partly scared, made no motion to interrupt, but her brain took in with extraordinary clearness the whole vivid scene—the grey rocks with the patch of scarlet aloe, the blue sky, the yellow sand, the white bones, the black skin of the girl, and the old man's grey hairs and dirty white kaross. So they may have all remained for perhaps a couple of minutes, when the girl ceased to speak. There was a second's silence, and then Pamela spoke quickly in English, with a ring of triumph in her voice.

"I told you so, Sekeke," she said.

Her voice partially reassured Cecil. "Oh, Pamela," she cried, "what are you doing?"

The old native turned his head instantly and looked towards her, but the other two did not move. "Stand exactly where you are, Cecily," said Pamela sharply. "Don't move on any account."

Cecil did not dream of disobeying. She stood silent while Pamela spoke again in short sentences to the native girl, and again passed her hands across the native's face. In a few seconds the eyes flickered once or twice and dropped their gaze, and then, quite suddenly, she and Pamela got up together. Pamela instantly turned to Cecil and came towards her holding out her hand, while the native girl yawned once or twice, glanced at the old man, smiled, and turned to reach for her blanket which she lifted from the ground beside her and threw across her naked shoulders.

"Cecily!" exclaimed Pamela, "fancy you here! What fun! Did you come to look for me? I'm so sorry I was out, but I shall be free in a moment. Forgive me—just a second."

She turned back to the natives. The old man had groped for his bones and hidden them in some skin receptacle that he carried. He was standing now, his arm on the girl's shoulder, while she had grasped a long stick and was plainly

waiting to lead on. Pamela said something to her at which she smiled, and held out a coin which the girl took eagerly with her other hand. Then the pair of them moved off, passing close by Cecil who shrank back into the bushes as they did so. The girl looked at her gravely, as they passed, but she saw then that the old man was blind, or nearly so. They moved round the rock and out of sight.

Cecil turned to her friend. "Oh Pamela," she said again, "whatever were you doing?"

Pamela laughed and took her arm. "You look like a queen of tragedy," she said. "Don't be so startled; it was nothing much, though I think it was highly successful. I was experimenting."

"Do explain," said Cecil, impatiently. "What were you doing with that filthy old man?"

"Old Sekeke? He isn't filthy, as a matter of fact, and he's an exceedingly interesting person. He's a witch-doctor who lives just over the river, and that's his daughter. He's been a clever old thing in his day, but that's getting over now, for he's nearly blind. He can hardly see to throw the bones—indeed he came to me just now because he had quite failed. So I threw them instead—or that's what it comes to. Oh, you needn't look so horrified. As a matter of fact I didn't use the bones at all. For some reason or another, they are no use to me. But I've a better and more scientific plan: I hypnotised that girl. She told us all we wanted to know—if it was true, which he will doubtless discover before he speaks. That's all."

"All!" exclaimed Cecil. "Really, Pamela, you are an amazing person! Can you hypnotise? I thought it was all a fraud. And anyway I think it's perfectly beastly for you to be mixed up with horrible old witch-doctors and people. It isn't—well, it isn't Christian for one thing."

Pamela laughed her curious little chuckle. "Really, Cecily," she said, "you are the most delightful creature I know. But I won't have you run down old Sekeke, to begin with. In his way, he's as good as most white doctors.

After all, what have they to work with? A knowledge of drugs, first, and then the faith of their patients. Time and again, it's the latter that does the business. Why, in the Spanish Flu, I went over to a Government Hospital in Pondoland to help. We ran out of drugs, of course, but the natives kept flocking to us, and in the end, what do you think we served out for their shillings? About an ounce of Epsom salts in sixteen ounces of water coloured with cochineal! We couldn't help it, but it was just as effective. One old woman shared her bottle with all her family, and came back in two days to demand more of the 'strong medicine!' We told them what would be the effect of Epsom salts, and they believed, and it happened. It's all one and the same with old ladies and bread pills. Well, then, a white doctor has better drugs than Sekeke, though he wouldn't have if he were limited to the plants that grew in his village. I doubt he'd do as well as Sekeke then. But when it comes to faith, Sekeke's patients give him a chance no white doctor ever has. Hence he's a wonder, is old Sekeke. And he knows a thing or two as well. He throws bones, but in Bond Street they use crystals and talk about clairvoyance. Different methods for the same thing, and there is something in both. But more in Sekeke's, I think," she added.

Cecil stood still, staring at her and revolving all this. "But what about your hypnotism?" she demanded.

Pamela's face changed. "That's another story," she said. "But it interests me—has done for years, and natives make wonderfully good subjects. Especially Nanea. I can do anything with her. And I think—oh never mind what I think. You wouldn't understand! Come on. You must be dying for your lunch."

"Oh Pam," said Cecil, "I wish you wouldn't do such things. You're awfully clever, I know, but I hate it. Oh do give it up, Pamela!"

The other girl shot a glance at her that she rarely gave to people. "Cecily dear," she said in a changed tone, "it's

sweet of you to speak like that. But you're you and I'm myself. I was made this way. I'm sorry you've seen what you have this morning, and yet I don't know: I'm glad in a way. I want you to know me. Our fates are mixed, my dear, and we've got to face them whatever they are. Before the end, you may be glad of me, Cecily."

Cecil stopped impulsively, threw her arms round her neck, and kissed her. She acted on the impulse, but it was a wise one. Pamela was startled, and made no great demonstration in return, but it cemented their rapid friendship. Pamela never forgot that kiss. Even now, she had a flash of her curious knowledge, for all she had disclaimed the power. "I shall give kisses for that kiss, Cecily," she cried.

The two stood for a moment in silence, and then Pamela made a little movement as if to brush something aside. "You didn't come alone," she went on gaily, "did you? Is Gwen with you? Oh, good, but we must hurry back. Still she'll be happy enough in the lounge, I daresay, smoking more cigarettes than are good for her. What do you think of our house, Cecil? Father's gone to Harding, but I expect he'll be back early. I hope he will, for I want him to meet you. Did you get tea? Oh, there's Gwen."

They were near the house now, and Gwen waved from the terrace. "Found at last are you, Pam?" she called. "Auntie Tot has just been in to see if you're not back."

They met in the garden. "You'd never think this had been solid rock, would you, Cecily?" demanded Pamela. "Father must have taken ages to make this place, but we both love it now. Come in, and let's have lunch if it's ready. Oh there you are, Auntie. Lunch ready? Yes, we shan't be a moment."

She took them in to her room to wash, a pleasant place right at the end of the passage and round a corner, for the house was built like an L on its side, of which the long bottom piece was lounge, drawing-room and study, all built facing sea-wards on the rock, and the upright contained the bedrooms running back towards the forest. From Pa-

mela's room you could step out on to another stoep, her private one she said, and from it, in a few yards, enter the shade of the trees. But they were thinner here, she explained, for the first mealie lands lay behind. From the end of this verandah, the view allowed you to look over Pondoland, and while Gwen washed, Cecil stood there and tried to make out the scene of the morning's adventure. But that was not easy. The slope of the hill grew more rough inland and was all strewn with rocks, any of which might easily have been the place. However Cecil's eyes were good, and she followed the path and finally decided on a spot. But there was no chance to ask Pamela if she were right, as she did not want to speak of it before Gwen.

The dining-room was next the study, and in keeping with the rest of the house. The stink-wood table was not covered, and its polished surface threw up the beautiful cut glass and the silver. A boy waited on them, and served a cold lunch admirably. Pamela insisted on their having a glass of wine, and when the fruit was placed on the table, with cigarettes and a silver lighter with its spirit flame, Cecil said:

"Pam! How nicely you do things! If I had a house, I'd like it to be like this!"

Their hostess laughed. "Father says the best part of living in the wilds, is that civilisation is all the more enjoyable," she said. "I agree with him. I don't see why one should always rough it. Probably one must at first, but most of us stay long enough to settle down. But it doesn't do to get too much attached to things. I'm always half expecting father suddenly to pack up and clear out. And as to the house, it wouldn't really suit you, Cecily. It's too untidy. We do what we like here, but then we've only ourselves to consider you see. Sometimes I don't see father till dinner, and sometimes not then."

"Aren't you awfully lonely?" demanded Gwen. "I should be. I always feel as if this big house were empty. I don't mean of things—though even the things give me

that feel—but of people. Why you could dine a dozen at this table easily, and dance in the lounge. And here you are, all by yourself!"

Pamela laughed. "Father and I have plenty to think about," she said, "and you can't be alone if you have books."

"Can't you!" exclaimed Gwen. "I can. So can you, Ces; you needn't say you can't. I like heaps of animals and lots of people and doing things, and you, Pam, you like—well, I don't know what you really like," she said. "You're so queer. You can ride and swim and shoot and tennis better than most of us, but you don't ever seem to do them because you like them particularly. I always think of you as sitting waiting in that lounge of yours for something to turn up!"

"Why not say for the fairy prince, and have done with it, Gwen?" demanded Pamela.

Gwen lifted her wine glass, and looked at her hostess gravely over it. She did not reply at once. Then: "No," she said slowly, "I'm not sure that you expect a fairy prince either. Also, if he came, I don't know what sort of a welcome he'd have. If he had fair hair and a shining sword and nice manners, like all the princes in the books, you would surely snub him, I think."

"Gwen!" exclaimed Cecil.

"Oh Pam won't mind. Now that sort of a prince would suit you, Ces. He'd suit me too, I daresay. Oh hark, there's the car!"

The sound of the engine came to them unmistakably. Pamela leant forward and rang a hand-bell. "Lunch for the master," she said to the boy when he came.

In a minute or two, a step sounded in the hall, and Mr. Urfurd came in. Cecil looked at him expectantly. As Gwen had said, she was at once a little disappointed. He was an entirely ordinary looking person.

He came in cheerfully. "Hullo, three of you! Why, it's Miss Eldred, isn't it? How good of you to come over.

Sorry I was out. Hullo, Gwen! Oh don't get up any of you, unless you've finished. 'Morning, Pamela. Your books have come."

"Oh have they, father," she exclaimed, jumping up. "Where are they?"

"In the car. I didn't wait to get anything out. But don't you go."

"Oh yes, I will. Stefano's bringing you lunch. 'Xcuse me a minute, won't you, Cecily?" And she went out.

"Well, Miss Eldred, and what do you think of Africa?" he said. "It's almost as if it were a first visit, isn't it? Besides, I don't think you ever were at Three Springs, were you?"

"No, Mr. Urfurd," she said, "I don't think I was. But what a lovely place this is! I've been admiring it so much."

The man smiled. "Yes, it's nice," he said. "My girl and I have nearly all we want here. There's always a 'nearly,' of course, in life, as you'll find out one day if you don't know it already. But I must say, we come as near escaping from that fate as anyone, I think. How are all your people? I haven't seen your father for quite a while."

They chatted on until Pamela came in. She carried a book under one arm and held another open in her hand. "I was right, father," she said excitedly. "Listen: 'The figures in these caves'—that is Bushman's Nek—'are several of them human with beast heads, curiously reminiscent of Anubis. So far as is known, these are unique in Africa and certainly lend colour to the idea of a migration of Bushmen from the Lower Nile and perhaps from the mountains of Judea.' 'Unique!' Then ours are a great discovery. We simply must go to Bushman's Nek and see these others."

"Maybe," said Mr. Urfurd, "but it's building a lot on a resemblance to suggest Egyptian influence. That's where so many mistakes are made. Fraser's books are full of

them. It's not a particularly remarkable idea. But at any rate, it certainly makes your discovery the more interesting."

Gwen glanced at Cecil. "Do tell us what you're talking about!" she exclaimed. "I never saw anything like you two! Who is Anubis?"

"Pamela apologise," said Mr. Urfurd laughing. "Anubis, Gwen, was an Egyptian god with the head of a jackal on a human body. He was the son of Set, and Set was the principle of Evil, the great opponent of Osiris, the man-god who rose from the dead and became King of Heaven and Judge of all. In Bushman's Nek, near Underberg, there's a cave of paintings made by the Bushmen, and some of them are like this god. Well, near here, about three miles up the river, Pam has discovered another cave, and in it are similar paintings. I thought there were others like this in South Africa, but she said she thought not. So we ordered that particular book, and you observe that she is right. Only I'm still against the Egyptian theory," he added.

"Thanks," said Gwen, "but how perfectly thrilling. We must see those caves! Do take us. Wouldn't you love to see them, Ces?"

Cecil got up. "I should," she said, "but we can't go this afternoon, that's plain. Perhaps some other day Mr. Urfurd will take us. Will you, Pamela?"

"Oh yes," she said, "if you like, but it's a beastly climb. Wouldn't photographs satisfy you?"

"No, no, *no*," said Gwen. "They won't. I shan't look at them, Pam. I insist on going. Do ask us nicely, Mr. Urfurd."

Mr. Urfurd glanced amusedly from his daughter to Gwen. "Miss Gwendoline Eldred," he said, "will you honour us by accepting an invitation for Saturday week at a picnic to be held in the Anubis caves? Lunch at one o'clock sharp on the river. Start from here at eleven. Miss Pamela Urfurd will

lecture from two till three on her recent discoveries and their relation to Egyptian mythology."

"I wish," said Gwen, as they rode home a little later, "that Mr. Urfurd did not always make me feel that he was laughing at me."

CHAPTER VI

CECIL stood dripping on the shore before breakfast on the Saturday morning of their invitation some ten days later, when Fanny brought her down a folded note which had just arrived. The boy who had brought it was waiting for an answer, and she read it at once where she stood.

"CECILY DEAR (it ran),

"You are to come to us for the week-end, not only for the day—you, Gwen and Len. I shan't take 'no' for an answer, because I really can't remember when Three Springs had a house-party for a week-end before. You must have bewitched father, I think, to make it possible. There will be a few others here, including ——! so bring a party frock with you for the evening which shall outshine us all! Lunch here at one. We shall ride to the cave, so come in breeches, which are also better for caves.

"Yours ever,
"P. U."

Cecil read it again and laughed to herself excitedly. Then she looked round for Gwen and her brother, and observed them both some distance out, sitting on a rock soft with seaweed and paddling their feet in the water which gently rose and fell beneath them. "Here," she exclaimed to Fanny, "hold this. I won't be a minute." And she ran down to the sea, plunged in, and swam out straight and strong to the rock.

In a minute or so she was there, gliding in on the swell and catching hold of Len's feet to steady herself. "Such

fun," she gasped. "A letter's come from Pamela Urfurd asking the three of us for the week-end instead of for the day. What do you say?"

"O topping," cried Gwen. "And what an event! I've never stayed a night at Three Springs in my life."

"Nor I," said Leonard, "but I should like to. Any others to be there?"

"Yes," replied Cecil, "'a few others,' Pamela says. Then that's settled, is it?"

"I suppose we'd better ask dad," said Leonard. "He might want me—not that he's the least likely to now, though. Still, we ought to ask. Look here, shall I go and ask him as it chiefly concerns me, and send a note back for you, Ces?"

"Oh, Len, would you?"

"Let go my foot then. Want to come up? Well, catch hold."

He gave her a hand and pulled her up to the flat weedy seat. Then he took a long clean header into the transparent water and was quickly away, arm over arm, to shore. The sisters watched him land, say a word to Fanny, and precede her up the beach.

Cecil gave a little sigh of content. "He swims well," she said.

Gwen nodded. "We all ought to. Mother says Len swam before he could walk. Did you ever know anything more gorgeous than this bathing place, Ces? Look at that bit of white coral down there, with the little blue fish swimming about it. I'll see if I can get it up."

Cecil caught hold of her arm. "No, don't, Gwen," she said, "I want to talk a minute. It's a good chance. Do you know we've hardly talked to each other at all since that first day when we went for that walk along the beach. Somehow it seems ages ago now. You would have thought that nothing much happened here, but instead of that, the days are full. There's hardly time for things instead of its being the other way on. And everything we do is so jolly."

"You think so, do you?" said Gwen.

"Why, of course! Don't you?"

Gwen did not answer at once. She began meditatively detaching little winkles and throwing them into the sea at the blue fish, who charged at each one as it side-slipped down to them under the impression that their heavens were dropping fatness. "Well, Ces," she said at last, "it's all new to you; to me it's all old. It's like the weather; you say every day 'splendid! another day of sun!' but we rather like the dull days. Things are jolly of course, especially a visit like this will be, but I've done all the other things till I'm tired of them. At least, if I'm not tired of them, I want something more. I feel as if I were always playing, and I want real things. Life's not *all* a game."

"Real things will come in time, won't they, Gwen?" said Cecil.

"Oh yes, I suppose so, but I'm beginning to want them badly. You seem so *comfortable,* Ces. You seem content to sit and wait. I'm not made like that, I suppose. Or perhaps your life in England has been so much more full than mine, that you haven't bothered to think about anything. But here—oh! I don't know, but everything seems living except myself."

Cecil looked at her gravely. It dawned on her that she felt more enlightened as to her sister's needs since her talk with Pamela. Gwen was sixteen, and at sixteen a girl bred in the open African life is a woman, and a hot-blooded woman at that. She was nineteen, but she had grown elsewhere.

"Tell me, dear," she said.

"I don't know what there is to tell you," said Gwen. "I don't know that I know myself—and yet I do. I won't lie about it. I know what I want. But you'd be shocked. You wouldn't understand."

"Tell me," said Cecil again.

Gwen wrenched off a streamer of seaweed and twisted it round her finger. "All right," she said suddenly, "I will. I

want a lover. I want someone who will seize me in his arms and kiss me till it hurts—not silly playing kisses. I want to be his woman—almost I want to feel that I'm his property. I don't know why I want it, but I do. But I'm frightened of wanting it, Cecil. It seems to me terrible, and there are so many things I don't understand. No one tells us anything. Mother ought to know, but she won't speak. I've tried to talk to her, but I can't somehow—she never gives one the chance. I want to know about men and how they feel. They're curious to me. When Harold did—well, what I told you he did, you know,—I felt I understood a little, but not altogether. His wanting Fanny can't have been like my wanting—oh, do say something! I can't go on alone." She broke off with something suspiciously like a sob in her voice.

Cecil did not speak quickly however. But she was no longer altogether surprised at Gwen, and she was already conscious that she could hear such a declaration unhorrified as she would have been quite recently. She put an arm round her sister's neck and stared out to sea. At that Gwen moved a little nearer and leant her wet head on Cecil's shoulder. Far out, a school of porpoises were leaping in and out of the water, raising little fountains of sun-lit blue-green sea, and both girls watched them without seeing. And when Cecil spoke at last, it was dreamily, so that she hardly knew herself to be speaking.

"We're very, very little bits of a big, big world, Gwen, I suppose," she said. "I've never thought of it like that before, but I suppose we are. It's true that I've never felt like you do, or never quite like what you said just now, but I think I see what you mean. Poor old Gwen, it must be hard. But I suppose if we wait long enough we shall understand. Can't you be a bit more quiet, Gwen? I wonder why you aren't. Is there anyone you want especially badly? Not just *a* man, but *the* man. It seems to me that that's what matters. And meantime everything's so beautiful that

one can be content to enjoy it and—and to wait, I suppose. Can't you wait, Gwen?"

The girl moved restlessly. *"I'm* tired of waiting," she said.

"But that's what I don't understand," said Cecil. "You're younger than I am, and yet you're tired before I've begun! Why is that? There must be some reason if we could only see it. And surely most girls are more like me than you, anyway. They were at 'The Lindens' I know—or I think they were. It's just because we've been brought up so differently, I suppose."

"I suppose so," echoed Gwen, but it was plain that she thought the explanation unsatisfactory.

They sat on a little longer and then Gwen shivered.

"Cold?" queried Cecil.

"What?" asked Gwen. "Oh, cold," and she laughed. "Yes, perhaps I am, though I didn't think it. Come on, let's get back. Let's plunge together and see who goes farthest. Get up! My word, we shall be late for breakfast!" And she got to her feet gingerly on the slippery rock.

Cecil got up slowly also and took her arm. "One minute," she said. "Just tell me one thing. Do you love anyone in particular, Gwen?"

The younger girl glanced at her irresolutely for just a moment. In Cecil's innocent eyes she read her complete ignorance. "Love?" she queried far too bitterly for sixteen years. "No, Ces, I think I hate instead. . . . Are you ready? Off!" And she dived far out into the still sea.

Cecil followed her. On the beach, they snatched their towels and hardly waited a minute before running up to the house. But in that minute Cecil asked the question she had not been given time to ask before. "Whom, Gwen?" she demanded.

But Gwen had recovered herself. "Oh, I don't know," she laughed. "Shenk perhaps. He's always calculating what everything is worth. If he were a Kaffir, he'd give father

twenty cows for me, I think. Perhaps not, now that you've come, though. You might do worse, you know, Ces. He's quite rich and is building a nice new house out of sight of his old store. You ought to see more of him, you know." And Cecil forgot to press her point in her amusement. It was Gwen who was conscious of stifling her thoughts and her desire for understanding as they climbed the beach. She knew instinctively that she must do so.

At breakfast Mr. Eldred said that he would send their horses over by a boy, and that they had better motor to Three Springs as they would have luggage and Cecil must be fresh for the afternoon. Cecil of course expostulated at being treated, as she said, like a London girl, but so it was settled. Leonard drove the car, but they took Mafolo, who was out of his wits with delight at the arrangement, to help in odd jobs. He was very smart for the occasion in a shirt and shorts, and crouched on the foot-board like a monkey. Gwen took her camera, which was nearly as big as the rest of her luggage and occupied about as long to select and pack. Cecil had a suit-case of a size that her sister scorned, but then there was that frock to be considered. Len brought a gun with him; and thus each significantly equipped, they started.

There was no question of the lower track that day in the motor, so they had to make a big detour and reach the main road from the north. Soon after the turning on the right to Harding, they swung round to the left, and there, by the side of the road, was another car. Its owner was underneath and only his legs protruded, but from the make of the motor and the circumstances, Len guessed their identity. "Hullo," he cried, "I believe that's old Hugh!"

He slowed down and got out laughing. As he did so, Sinclair emerged, dusty and with a big smear across his face. He smiled as he saw who they were, but with a rueful glance at his hands, and advanced to the car.

"Good-morning, all of you," he said, but with his eyes, Cecil thought, most obviously on her. "I've had a break-

down. The differential's gone this time, I fear. I've no luck with cars. Miss Eldred, don't laugh, please. If you'd been under the beastly thing half the morning, you'd sympathise."

"I do," she said, "but if you could see yourself you'd understand. You're nearly as black as Mafolo."

"Mafolo will save the situation, anyhow," said Len. "We'll leave him here to look after the car and take you on, Hugh. Hop in behind with Cecil."

"Oh I can't; I'm too filthy," he objected.

"Oh no you're not, Mr. Sinclair," said Cecil. "Shed that overall and wipe your hands on the grass, and I'll forgive the rest."

"Don't sit too close though, Hugh," said Gwen. "Cecil's got her new habit on."

They all laughed, but Cecil wished she did not blush so easily. Sinclair glanced at her as he got in and smiled as if he noticed it, she thought. And she was annoyed and pleased at the same time, which is disconcerting at first.

"Isn't this topping of the Urfurds," began Hugh when the car started. "I could hardly believe it when I got their invitation. However I'm sure it's all in your honour and we shall have a grand time. Urfurd's a good sort, though he is a little too retiring. Have you seen the house?"

"Yes," said Cecil. "We rode over the other day. As a matter of fact this party was partly fixed up then. Pamela has discovered a cave with Anubis in it—or something of that sort—and we're to go and see it."

"Who in the world's Anubis?" demanded Hugh.

"Oh I'm so glad you don't know!" cried Cecil. "I hadn't an idea, and I was afraid I ought to have had. The Urfurds seemed to take it for granted. She—or he, I really don't know which—is an Egyptian goddess, and it's a painting on the wall of the cave."

Hugh looked still more mystified. "I didn't know Egyptians were ever down in these parts," he said.

Cecil burst out laughing. "Oh," she cried, "you're

gloriously ignorant! You don't know a thing more about it than I did! But it's my fault. I don't think it is Anubis really. It's a Bushman painting anyhow. But the cave sounds awfully exciting, and I'm sure we shall have a glorious time."

"I shall, Miss Eldred," said Hugh, "or at least I hope so."

"I'm sure I hope you do," said Cecil thoughtlessly.

"Do you?" he said. "It all depends on you. It isn't the cave that matters to me. I believe you know that already. Shall I have a good time, Miss Eldred?"

The blood rushed again to Cecil's cheeks. The car swept swiftly along, the sun shone, the world smiled, and her heart was glad. She told herself it was all madness—she had only known him a few days!—but she could not help her reply. "I still hope so," she said softly.

His eyes sparkled. "We're nearly there," he said, "and I shall be able to see then, I hope. If we ride to the cave, do ride with me, or if we walk, walk with me, will you? Do promise. You can if you like."

Cecil leant back in the padded car luxuriously with that still delightfully new sense of power. "We shall see," she said gaily, "but I think we had better change the subject now, don't you? Do you like motoring, Mr. Sinclair?"

"Oh I love it," he said, clinging to his seat as they bumped over a stone. ("Sorry," sang out Leonard.) "But I could improve this situation. Can you guess how?"

"A better road, I should think," laughed Cecil.

"And clean hands," said Sinclair as they swung through the gates of the farm. "Also a longer journey and a smaller company. What do you think?"

"I refuse to think," she said, "and anyway there's Mr. Urfurd and Pamela. Oh Pam, this is splendid of you. It *is* good of you to ask us, Mr. Urfurd," she added, shaking hands. "Is that Mr. Shenk too? What a party we are! Who's the chaperone, Mr. Urfurd?"

"To tell you the truth, I've got out of the habit of thinking of chaperones," he said smiling, "but I suppose I'm cast

for the rôle so far as it goes. Come in, anyhow. Where's your car, Sinclair? We expected you an hour ago."

He and Hugh fell to the rear talking of the latter's mishap, and went off together to get oxen and boys to go for the crippled car. Shenk brought Cecil in, following the other three, passing round the house and in at the lounge door. There, Pamela played hostess. "Mr. Shenk," she said, "take Len off to the dining-room and get him an appetiser, will you, and have one yourself. Oh, but wait a moment. Cecily, what about you? Let's all have one to inaugurate things properly. You will, Gwen, I know, being a dissipated young thing. Come, Cecily, you must—a tiny wee mixed Vermouth, my dear, and this prosaic earth will be heaven. No? Well, lemonade then, anyway. If you two men will go and bring a collection of glasses and bottles here, then, we'll all be happy together. You look happy enough, though, Cecil, without Vermouth," she added under her breath. "Have the gods been kind to you, my dear?"

"Right-ho!" cried Len, boisterously, "come and lend a hand, Gwen." And the three went out together.

Cecil darted a glance at Pamela and threw herself into a chair. "Pam," she said, "I feel absolutely riotous already. Do come and tell me some more about Anubis quickly before Mr. Sinclair comes back. I was trying to explain to him in the car and got into a fearful muddle. Was it a he or a she, anyway? I quite forget."

"I thought you looked as if you had been talking mythology," said Pamela, slyly, "but not Egyptian. Are you sure you have not been mixing up another deity with Anubis? Cupid, for instance, Cecily?"

The return of the others saved Cecil a reply, and as the drinks were in process of being mixed, in came the other men. "Good," said Mr. Urfurd. "Sinclair, you can do with a gin and bitters before lunch, I expect. What, have they led you astray, Miss Gwen? You won't indulge that habit at 'The Lindens,' I know!"

At luncheon their host outlined the plan of the proceedings.

"I thought you might ride down," he said. "If you cross the river below the house and go a mile or two farther through Pondoland, you can come out not far from the cave. Then tea and exploration. The boys have already taken supplies down, and we propose you dine down there and walk back afterwards when the moon gets up. Then there'll be some cold supper here, and so to bed, as Mr. Pepys says. Do you approve, Miss Eldred?"

"It sounds perfect," said Cecil. "If you planned all that, you're a genius, Mr. Urfurd. Or was it Pamela? which do you suppose, Mr. Shenk?"

It had been on the tip of her tongue to appeal to Sinclair, but somehow she felt she could not look at him after just such an outline of the walk and ride he had hoped for in the car. But it was he who replied.

"It was Miss Urfurd," he said. "But tell me just one thing and I'll know for certain. Have you sent a gramophone down, Miss Pamela?"

"Did we, father?" asked Pamela innocently.

"I knew it," cried Hugh. "Gwen, I can't do it myself, so kindly go and thank our hostess duly."

Gwen sprang up. "Oh," she cried, "I know I ought to wait for you to rise, Pamela, as this is a most proper party, but I can't! I'm dying to go. Mr. Urfurd, do let's start. I believe we're going to have the most glorious day I've ever known!"

Mr. Urfurd laughed. "Have a cigar, Shenk," he said, "and pass the box to Sinclair, will you. Well, I hope you do. You must excuse me. Picnics are not much in my line. Pamela knows the way even better than I do, and you can all look after yourselves. I'll send the horses round, and expect you back about ten. I see you brought a gun, Leonard, and there are pigeon in the cave, so it's worth while. If you men want another, you've only got to say so. You know the gun-room I think, Sinclair, so please take what you like." And he left by the open doors on to the stoep in the direction of the stables.

Pamela assumed command. "Mr. Sinclair, if you do want a gun, go and get one, and in any case, will you look after the male section? I've roused father up to a point he's scarcely ever reached before, but no human power can carry him further. If you girls 'll come with me, we'll go and get ready. Meet on the stoep of the lounge in ten minutes."

When it came to starting, Pamela led the way, followed by Leonard, his sister and Shenk behind, Cecil next, and Hugh in the rear. It seemed a reasonable arrangement, but Cecil felt a little guilty, as if she had schemed for it. At any rate, at first, the track only permitted of single file, and they were all close together. The talking that went on ought more properly to be called shouting, and consisted chiefly of that frequent and ultimately annoying remark on such occasions: "What do you say?"

But across the river, it was possible to ride abreast, and Hugh ranged up on Cecil immediately. For a while it seemed as if they had little to say to each other. He was not an adept at making small talk, and at first they merely discussed Three Springs and the immediate excursion, calling each other's attention to a gay flower here or the view there. However at length he said: "When are you going to pay me that visit, Miss Eldred? I'm all ready for it. The sheep are sheared and the mealies in, and even the house has been cleaned. When is it to be?"

"I don't know," said Cecil. "You mustn't ask me. It's too big an affair altogether. You must come and talk to father about it. But I wish you would. Gwen and I are dying to go to the Malutis. Couldn't you ask Mr. Urfurd and Pamela as well, and arrange for us to go up Bushman's Nek and see this other cave that they're so keen to see?"

"Yes, I could, but I don't know that I want Urfurd or his daughter particularly just now. Another time we can perhaps arrange it so. I want you all to come out to Springfontein by yourselves this time. Will you back it up, anyway?"

"Of course, only you must ask daddy."

"I will. I'll come over next week—no, better still, I'll ride back with you after this week-end, if I may, and ask him then. And, Miss Eldred, there's something else I want to ask him as well."

"Really," said Cecil. "Oh do then. But look, the others are out of sight. Let's canter here a bit."

It was ten minutes before he could return to the subject. "Can you guess what I want to ask your father—Cecil?" he said.

It was awfully stupid (she told herself) but her heart leapt at the name. Yet she was instantly on her guard. Neither time nor place pleased her ladyship, uninstructed as she was in all that bad black business, but untold centuries of experience rallied to her aid. "No," she said, "how should I know? Look! Do get me some of those delicious forget-me-nots down there by that spring!"

He dismounted as in duty bound. Cecil sat her horse idly, watching, and then suddenly regretted that the flowers were forget-me-nots. Fate had outwitted nature once again. He came to her where she sat, with the starry blue bunch, but did not give them up all at once. "I want to ask your father if I may try to teach you the meaning of these flowers, Cecil," he said. "They give me just the chance to say what I did not know how to say. May I ask that of him, dear?"

Cecil's little world stood still. It was as if she suddenly had vision of infinite things, wide vistas reaching to eternity and a glimpse of God. Conventional Hugh and unsophisticated Cecil disappeared. A man stood by a woman and asked if she would fulfil with him the inscrutable purposes of their being. Nor was there any escape. She glanced hurriedly around for it, but they were again alone on the winding hill-side path, with the little stream singing below them of the webs of fate and the blue sky serene above. Driven back upon herself, Cecil pulled the last weapon from her armoury. And in the nature of things, once that is used, surrender is imminent.

"Oh how can I say?" she cried. "Don't ask me yet, please, *please!*"

"Dear," said he, "I'm not asking you what I hope I may ask one day. But I would like to know if it is with your good-will that I say what I shall say to your father. It need not mean anything irrevocable to you if you say 'yes,' but it will mean much to me."

She looked at him. God knows what she saw in him—more than others had done it is to be supposed. But then what does any woman see in such a moment? In a way there was nothing in him that deceived her at any rate, but she deceived herself. She supposed she was free to speak what she would; she supposed she knew what she meant; she supposed that it was truly not irrevocable. But how often is a woman's least answer any of these things? "Yes," she said simply, "you may."

He surrendered the flowers without a word and climbed again into the saddle. They rode on for a few minutes in silence. Cecil was staring at her horse's head and questioning stupidly how he had come to have a little nick out of his left ear. Then Hugh spoke, and with such a note in his voice that she wondered for a moment if she knew the man who was speaking. As he went on, the feeling grew on her that life had gone beyond her power.

"Oh Cecil," he said, "how wonderful it all is! It seems to me that I have been knocking up and down the world for all these years, just for this. Springfontein seemed to me a different place when I went back to it from you before, but now——! Oh in a way, I regret this week-end! I want to go back and work and plan and build for you know what. I see, now, why a man feels that he must get a resting place; there is that in him which wishes to make a home. I see, now, why life is worth living and its battles worth fighting. I regret nothing now, neither the hardships nor the defeats nor the set-backs. They make this the more worth while. Only I wish that Springfontein was better—that I had a few

thousand instead of a few hundred pounds. I'm not a rich man, dear. And I'm a very ignorant one. I've really nothing to offer you, except just myself."

Cecil wanted to stop him. She wanted to say that he was running on too fast, taking too much for granted. She had promised nothing; she had only granted a permission she could hardly refuse. But she could not put it into words. "I wonder if any woman asks more," she found herself saying.

"Not if she is in love," said Hugh simply. "That's what makes women so great. It doesn't matter to them that we are roughened and hardened and dirtied. But it matters to us. We see, then, what blind fools we have been. Cecil, I can't tell you all about myself now, but I must one day. What will you say then, I wonder? But if you can come to love me, dear, I know already."

"He will probably tell you all his sins and you will weep and forgive him." The words sounded to Cecil utterly heartless now, but she suddenly remembered them with a little sense of fear. How should Pamela know these things? Surely this golden afternoon was unique in time! Impatiently she flicked up her horse.

Hugh misunderstood. "I've said more than I ought," he said when he caught her up. "I'm so sorry. But it can't be unsaid. Don't be angry, Cecil."

His tone was so humble that a swift revulsion of feeling came over her, and her voice grew tender. "I'm not," she replied. "It's not that at all. But let us ride on more quickly now. Tell me of your Rhodesian days. And when we reach the others, ride a bit with Gwen."

"You darling!" he exclaimed joyfully. "I will—if you'll walk home with me in the evening."

She laughed outright, her nervous tension unaccountably gone. "I don't know," she said, "probably not!"

But the others had dismounted across the stream when they rode up. Pamela turned to greet them. "There you are at last," she cried. "Tea's ready. Don't you want it?

We should have begun next minute if you hadn't come up."

"Hot scones too, Miss Eldred," Shenk called to Cecil, "and the scones of Three Springs are famous in the country. And do tell your brother to remove his gun from this neighbourhood. He's not seen a pigeon yet, and he'll shoot us in despair if you don't!"

"Hugh, come and sit by me," said Gwen. "Pam's going to lecture on her cave during tea and we can go to sleep comfortably together. I'm sure you know nothing about Bushmen or Egyptians, and, if you told the truth, care less. Also, I like your cigarettes. Here, you can have half my coat."

Tea over, they explored the cave. It was more of a hollow in the cliff than a cave, but certainly a deep one at that. You scrambled up a rough cleft in the hill-side, and at the head of it, set behind a deep fringe of bushes, was the wide semicircular place that would have hidden a hundred men. Its lip was composed of great boulders, and a tiny trickle of water fell from the top some eighty feet above and plashed ceaselessly on the rocks beneath. They were all more or less silent as they stood there. Shenk climbed up on a boulder and looked down. "Two men with repeating rifles and plenty of ammunition could hold this place against anything short of artillery," he said.

Cecil shivered. "Pamela," she said, "it gives me the creeps, I don't know why. It feels as if men had been murdered here."

"They have," said Pamela carelessly, pulling aside a bush. Behind it lay an almost complete skeleton, clean and white, and still lying as it had first fallen there. "However, I don't believe this is a Bushman's skeleton, by the way," she went on, "and I think they are a woman's bones. There was a curious knife by it, too, but I've got that at home. If you care to speculate, Cecily, you can picture to yourself a tragedy here—some one of us poor women deceived again by love, even though she was probably black."

"Oh Pamela," cried Cecil, "how awful!" And she turned quickly aside. Hugh stepped between her and it. "Why

don't you have it buried?" he demanded. "You shouldn't leave it here."

Pamela looked coolly at him. "Why not?" she retorted. "Would she be better off six feet under ground? After life's fitful fever, she sleeps well; let her sleep."

"If she sleeps," said Shenk, with a little laugh.

Pamela turned quickly towards him. "Ah yes," she said, "*if*. That, you and I don't know, *yet*, Mr. Shenk."

Shenk looked what he felt but said nothing. However as he and Hugh followed the rest back, he said: "That girl gives me the creeps, Sinclair. She's uncanny." Hugh skirted a boulder carefully; he did not much care for Shenk. "It's your bad conscience, perhaps," he said with a laugh. "I don't creep." Which was not exactly true, and hard on Shenk in any case, for he was a good enough fellow.

The Anubis figures were certainly interesting. There were two, one apparently following a long line of various buck, with a couple of hartebeest especially well drawn, and the other, above them all, seemingly watching the procession. Human figures, with bows and arrows, crouched under cover and were apparently hunting the animals. But the interpretation was not easy to read. "You see," Pamela pointed out, "it might mean that the jackal-headed beasts, in the mind of the artist, drove the animals—gods of nature, perhaps. But then the Bushmen had no such ideas, or none that we know."

"Perhaps they're not Bushman paintings at all," said Gwen.

"Oh I think they are," said Pamela. "If not, they are indeed a find. Even as it is, I'm inclined to believe that they are uniquely valuable as showing that even the Bushmen believed in some power behind the world of nature and perhaps in command of it. Half beasts themselves, they might easily have imagined that power to be half beastly. It would have been a tribal memory from the days when their fathers trekked down through Africa from Egypt or beyond. You can picture them crouching naked at night in their holes on the hill-side and guarding the rocks yonder against foul

things creeping up the valley in the dark. And then when the sun restored their courage, they drew these pictures on the rocks, embodying their fear. It may have been so; at any rate there are none left to tell us."

"None?" queried Cecil.

"None, my dear. We whites shot them down at sight as if they had been jackals, or poisoned their wells. The Kaffirs hunted them down in droves. They would not civilise you see, or work, not even with the aid of a sjambok. Their cousins, the baboons, are wiser and take to inaccessible rocks. But the Bushmen fled till they could fly no farther, and then, as they could not climb like monkeys, they died instead. Your old Jacob, Cecil, used to spear them when he was a boy; he told me a white man gave him so much per head. He was rather clever at it, I should think. But it was risky work; they had stings." And she pointed to the bows in the hands of the hunters in the pictures.

"Let's get back," said Hugh. "It will be dark soon. We're very grateful to you, but this part of the show has ceased to be cheerful, Miss Pamela."

"Has it?" said Pamela. "Well, I don't suppose it was very cheerful for the Bushmen, though most of them died fighting, which was perhaps their best means of exit. In their own way, they died for freedom, and for their jackal-headed gods."

Pamela led the way back and Cecil followed close behind her. "Pam," she said when the going was a bit easier, "do you really mean white men poisoned these poor creatures' wells?"

"Yes," said her guide. "Sounds horrible, I admit, but after all, if it was a good and not too painful poison, it may not have been such a bad way."

"Pam! You don't mean it!" cried Cecil, ranging up alongside as they reached the river. "It's too awful."

"Well," retorted the other, argumentatively, "the Bushmen would raid the flocks. It wasn't as if they were content with a sheep now and again either, but they'd kill a score of ewes

for the sake of a few tid-bits. Or, as a matter of fact, half kill the poor beasts. They wouldn't listen to reason; they wouldn't be permanently bribed; and they fought and hid like wild-cats. I can imagine myself—— Look out!" she cried suddenly.

Cecil started instantaneously at the quick change of tone, glanced right and left, and then sprang back with a shriek of horror. On her left, emerging from the bushes, was the deadliest of South African snakes, the black mamba. For a second the reptile seemed to hesitate as to whether or not it would dispute with them the right of way, and then it turned to escape. But that one second cost it its life. Pamela, quick as thought, leapt forward sjambok in hand. Once, twice, three times, she struck the writhing thing, and then ceased.

"Object lesson, Cecily," she said with a chuckle. "There was no time then to think of sentiment, and I expect that's what the farmers felt. Come on. There's nothing to fear. His day's work is done. Let's send the boys for him. He's a good specimen, but you can have the skin if you like."

"Oh Pam," cried Cecil admiringly and breathing freely again, "what a nerve you have! If it had come for me I could have done nothing. You didn't hesitate a second."

"Rule for life, Cecily," Pamela said. "Strike when you must and strike hard."

Cecil sighed. "I suppose so," she said, "but, Pam, I wish you weren't so—so——" And she stuck for a word.

"Yes," laughed Pamela. "Out with it. Don't mind me!"

Then Cecil remembered Gwen's word. "Well, Pam,—I can't help it—*ruthless*," she said.

Pamela took her arm with a display of affection unusual in her. "But, Cecily," she said, "we're pals, aren't we? and apparently there are times when it is a handy virtue for one of us at least to possess."

CHAPTER VII

CECIL woke in the night and could not get to sleep again. She did not want to do so at once, however. She lay staring at the window from which she had drawn back the curtain and through which she could see the tops of trees in a white sheet of moon. The window was open and all the sounds of the night came through to her—the hoot of an owl, the noise of cicalas, the rustling of leaves, and once the crow of a sleepy cock. But she was not thinking of the night. Rather she turned over in her mind all the doings of the day, and was glad to lie there and think of the many things which could not be said.

She reasoned with herself as to whether or not she was sorry that she had not walked home with Hugh, or rather that she had refused to be alone with him. She knew exactly why. He had made it impossible, she told herself, when his hand had sought hers under the blanket as they lay by the stream after dinner and listened to the gramophone. Pamela had been on the other side of her, and she had trembled lest they had been seen. But the rug had utterly hidden them, hidden enough of them, that is, to conceal even the slight movement he had made as his fingers sought hers. Once there, however, she had let them have their way, and suffered the caress as they stroked her wrist. She had thrilled with love for him then, she thought. There rang in her head, as if it had been the sweetest music, the lines of the lilting chorus:

"When the moon shines,
Over the cow-shed,
I'll be waiting at the k-k-kitchen door."

Dear old Hugh! There was something about him that moved her inexpressibly. She was glad he was so much older than she, glad that he was just an honest kindly strong man who sought her so honourably. But when they had got up to go, she had suddenly been afraid. If she walked home alone with him, what might not happen? An irrevocable kiss might be given, for a kiss seemed to her as solemn a thing as that. No, no, *no*, not yet. Let him ask her father; let him woo her a little more; let her hold off for a while. It was asking too much. Never again alone like this. . . .

She shifted to a more comfortable position. There was Gwen, now; she did not feel in the least like Gwen. Gwen was tired already. It seemed so absurd. Gwen wanted a lover. What did she mean? She was not at all sure that she, Cecil, wanted a lover. She wanted Hugh in a way, but really she was chiefly content that he was there, in the background so to speak. She wondered what she ought to say to Gwen, and the more she thought of it, the more troubled she became. It wasn't *right* of Gwen. But what could one say? She would ask Pam—not directly, of course, but in the way one could. . . .

And then Pamela took possession of her. She hardly thought consecutively now, but allowed images to drift by her—the cave, the trickle of water, the pictures, those awful bones. She shifted over again at that, to get rid of the thought, and effectively did.

When she awoke, the sunlight was streaming in and there was Pam by her side with a tea-tray. "Oh you're awake at last, are you," said her hostess. "I looked in half an hour ago and you were snoring. Now however, I had determined to wake you. I want to have my tea with you, so I've brought a whole outfit. There! bread and butter for you and cigarettes for me. I wonder when you'll begin to smoke, Cecily."

"Never, I think," said Cecil. "I don't want to, not one bit."

Pamela carefully selected a cigarette, and went through

her ritual. But before she could speak, Cecil burst out laughing. "Oh, Pam," she said, "you're prodigious! At times you're terrible, but not on a bright morning like this. Also it's the Sabbath and witches have no power. Hence I have no fear of the oracle about to sound. Now speak."

Pamela made no immediate reply. She pushed the tray a bit farther back on the little side-table, kicked off her slippers, threw off her dressing-gown, and stood revealed in silk pyjamas at which Cecil stared a little. Then she pulled back the sheet and got into bed, or rather half in, for she remained leaning on the pillow and looking down at Cecil whose black hair streamed across the white pillow case. "There," she said, "that's all the oracle."

Cecil snuggled up against her. "You're rather a dear, Pam," she said, "and I love you. But I don't see much of an oracle in this."

"Don't you?" replied the other coolly; "pyjamas with you in bed! Has that ever happened before, for Gwen doesn't wear them I know, and when will it happen again?"

Cecil crimsoned and hid her face. "Pam!" she exclaimed, "don't!"

Pamela put her cigarette between her lips and pushed her fingers through the girl's hair caressingly. "Poor little one," she said, "it was rather beastly. But are you sure you love him, Cecily?"

Cecil reached out her white arm and began to play with the strings of her friend's pyjamas. By this time, Pamela's penetration no longer surprised her friend, so she only said, "Yes, Pam; I think so."

"You must not think; you must know."

"How can one know? Last night, coming home, I was terrified of him in a way. I dreaded to be alone."

"He kissed you, did he?" asked Pamela gently. "In the afternoon?"

"Oh no," said Cecil. "You're wrong for once, Pamela. What fun!"

"Did he not? No, Cecily, I'm not wrong really—though

perhaps I ought to have seen that if so you would not have been frightened any longer. No, my dear, I'm incredibly, unbelievably right. What did he do? Let's see, I expect he hinted at things and—oh, yes, he's going to ask your father's leave to propose to you. Is that it?"

Cecil was not far off tears. "Pam!" she exclaimed, "please don't. You spoil everything. You're laughing at him, and you hurt me awfully."

Pamela plunged her cigarette into a tea-cup that she had already slopped over in getting into bed, and then bent impulsively and kissed the black hair and rather misty eyes of the girl beside her. And at that Cecil shot her arms round her friend's neck and held her so a moment. "Oh Pam," she whispered, "I'm so sorry. You're a darling."

"No, I'm not," said Pamela disengaging herself, but sinking a little lower into bed at the same time. "It was rather brutal, but you see, dear, Hugh *is* so conventional. It's all falling out exactly as I said. Of course he falls in love with you; of course he approaches like—well, like that; and of course you take his forget-me-nots and wait for his kisses, against the day they'll come, like a strayed Psyche. It's all as it ought to be—perhaps. But be sure you love him, Cecily."

"What is love, Pam?" whispered Cecil.

Pamela made no answer. She had hard work not to do so though. The hard and cynical things she learned of her books, of her solitariness and of Nature, were on the tip of her tongue. But she did not say them, and the moment passed, for Cecil answered herself without waiting for her friend to reply, and Pamela, knowing nothing of what lay behind, marvelled.

"Is it to want a lover, Pam?" went on Cecil softly. "To want him to seize you in his arms and to kiss until it hurts almost. To want to be his wife, no, I mean his woman; to want to feel that you are his property. And not to be quite sure you really do want it—to be almost frightened of it—but still to want it, and to want—yes, I think it's that too—to

want to be a mother. Is that love, do you think, Pamela?"

Pamela's straying fingers on her hair stopped motionless. "Who told you, Cecily, little one?" she demanded quietly. "Oh my dear, fancy your knowing that! Has your heart taught you that already?"

But at her words, Cecil rolled over on her side and hid her face again. So Gwen knew! How? Was this what Africa did for one? But did she, Cecil, know these things? Why was it she did not feel them?

A minute or two slipped by in silence, and then she came to a determination and sat abruptly up. "Pamela," she said, "I want to tell you a terrible thing and to ask you about it. Will you promise me faithfully never, *never,* to breathe a word to a soul?"

Pamela smiled at her vehemence. "Surely, Cecily," she said.

"Well, then, when I got home I found out a terrible thing. It doesn't matter how I found out, but I know now it is certainly true. Nobody has told me for certain, but I feel it to be true somehow, and it fits in with things in this country. I can't get it off my mind. It's this—oh, it's hard to tell you—Harold was sent away to Rhodesia because he was flirting with our half-caste servant Fanny." She crimsoned as she spoke. *"Flirting,* Pam. Father must have feared things too awful for words. But just think of it. To think that Harold, our Harold, should love a woman who's actually partly a Griqua! Oh Pam, how could he?"

Pamela settled herself more comfortably in the bed. It was an astonishing morning, she thought, and required grappling with. What would this child ask next? What was there in this for such alarm? However, when she was comfortable, she pronounced judgment. "I don't in the least suppose he did—or does—love her," she said.

"But, Pam, that's not the point. Or not exactly the point. It seems he—he *wanted* her. That's what I can't get over. That's what I can't understand a bit. I can understand wanting Hugh like—well, as I've said; Hugh might be

wanted like that. But how does it come in between Harold and Fanny? Fanny might easily have loved Harold, I suppose, but Harold. . . . He must have made Fanny hope for —for, well, perhaps for a child. Do you think he could possibly have thought of *that,* Pamela?"

"I should take it that was about all he did think of," she replied coolly.

"But then what are men like," whispered Cecil, white-faced.

"They're much as God made them," said Pamela, smiling.

"God did not make people like that," said Cecil. "I can't believe it."

"Well, as the devil made them then," retorted Pamela.

"But, Pam, he isn't as powerful as all that. Can he spoil the most wonderful things in life? And how does one know when it is the devil and when it is God?"

"Ah," exclaimed Pamela involuntarily, "how indeed!"

"But one knows when he is about," said Cecil.

"Does one?"

"Yes. You can't trick me, Pam. Why (and her voice sank low) I'm sure a mother knows that her baby is from God."

The elder girl looked at her wonderingly. "Are you inclined to mix up God with the affair of Harold and Fanny, then?" she asked almost cruelly.

"Oh," cried poor Cecil, "that's just it. I don't understand!"

Pamela abandoned all pretence. "See here, Cecily," she said. "Let's have done with riddles. After all, on the eve of what you are contemplating, you ought to have done with them. Sometime or another you must face facts, you must get down to life. The birth of a baby is not only a sentimental affair, the result of loving and kissing. It's a natural thing of the body as well. You know that, I suppose, as well as I, and it is foolish to pretend it is indecent to talk about it. The very Prayer Book tells you that marriage is for that end, even although some parsons do leave it out, and you

must know that there are marriages which are not made as a result of love. For there's lust as well as love. There's the desire for bodily things which can come when there is no love at all. It's a terrible passion, my dear, a human figure with a jackal's savage head. It's the great upthrust of nature through all our trappings and conventions. Love beautifies it, ennobles it, cloaks it, but love does not cause it. Or at least I think not. There can be one without the other. And often human nature lusts before it loves, and even lusts where it does not love at all. That jackal-headed beast gripped Harold, I suppose, my dear. Maybe, it grips men more than women; very probably it does. It's theirs to seize and give—give—give; ours to receive and to endure and to protect the life that grows in us. As for Fanny, she was ready to take what her nature taught her to demand when it was offered her. Her strain of native blood made her think no more of it than that. I don't know that I blame either very much."

She had spoken savagely, and her stream of words seemed to crush Cecil who lay quite still when she had done, conscious, chiefly, of a bitterness she could not understand. But in a moment curiosity got the better of her. "Pam," she said, "how do you know all that?"

Pamela shrugged her shoulders. "Books," she said, "and living among natives, using one's wits and one's eyes. Besides we are not all so placid as you seem to be, Cecily."

Cecil stared at her in bewilderment. Then gradually, a thought framed itself—"Poor Gwen!" And it stung her into words.

"Oh Pamela," she cried, "don't talk of such things! You seem to tear down all the veils and make it all hideous. People aren't—aren't *beasts!*" And she burst into tears.

This time Pamela did not comfort her. "Venus came naked from the sea," she said drily. "And you must face life sooner or later, Cecily; one day you may even be grateful to me that I explained."

Cecil raised a wet face from her pillow. "At any rate,"

she declared fiercely, "I shan't think of such things any more. You are not to talk to me of them again. I'm not made like that, and nor is Hugh, I'm sure. Let's get up. I shan't quarrel with you, especially as I began it (and she smiled faintly), but let's forget that we ever talked of it at all!"

Pamela got leisurely out of bed and groped with her feet for her slippers as she slipped on her light dressing-gown. "We won't, dear, if you're so sure of yourself and of him. I'm glad you can be. And now," she added, "don't hurry. Breakfast is any time in this house. Would you like it in bed?"

"Oh no," said Cecil. "I hate breakfast in bed. It's so sloppy. And besides it's another glorious day. What a country it is! You ought all to be made to live in England for a while. You talk a lot about nature, but you don't half appreciate her, I think!"

"No," said Pamela at the door; "we know her."

That day Cecil found Hugh more clean, simple and straight than ever. And he was all these things in great measure. Little as she realised it, the talk of the morning threw her into his arms. There was that in her manner which was appealing and trustful that day. He responded to it, naturally. He thought he had seen no one like her in her innocence and candour. It is a frame of mind not uncommon among lovers, but in Cecil's case it was certainly true. And for her part, when she went to bed, she could hardly say her prayers for joy, and she told her God that she was sure of her heart.

PART II

THE WIFE

CHAPTER I

HUGH snored.

It was not in the least an aggressive snore and its effect was soothing rather than annoying, indeed Pamela Urfurd has declared ere now that she likes Hugh best when he is snoring. According to her, his general placidity is then completely and happily demonstrated. But then Pamela is—well, Pamela, and at any rate she is not his wife.

Cecil had been, however, nearly three years his wife, a time long enough for her to frown slightly when he snored. She was adorable when she frowned. A little later, Christopher Ashurst was wont to declare that he loved Hugh to snore just because it made Cecil frown, and he would then describe that frown, being by way of a connoisseur in woman's emotions. But her frown did not last long; there had not yet been time enough for that.

There is no doubt that she had good reason to frown. Husbands are more or less entitled to snore in the presence of their wives, but in the right place and at the right time. After dinner, and when there are guests, is not the right time. That can hardly be denied. When they were alone, Cecil permitted it to pass unchallenged, had indeed by now become accustomed to it, and would perhaps merely glance up from her book, look at him as he had never seen her look and for which he would have but loved her more than ever if he had, and then settle her cushions more comfortably and fall to reading again. For Cecil had come to realise what a difference in years there was between them, and, still more, what a difference in temperament. After his conscientious day on the farm and his terrific wrestle with his accounts before dinner, Hugh liked to eat heartily, light his

pipe, settle himself in his chair, and take up a newspaper. In five minutes he would nod; in ten gently allow his pipe to slip from between his lips and fall to the floor, from which he would sleepily retrieve it, placing it on the table at his side; and in fifteen, nasally announce to the world about him that he was at peace with life. More days than not, on that lonely farm, Cecil made up his sole audience, and if she frowned a little because he did not show at the moment superabundant interest in herself, she smiled also because, after all, he was a dear old thing and it was nice for him to be content.

But with Pam visiting there it was another matter, and it wasn't even as if he snored when Pam was alone with them. The night before, when the Hardcastles had been asked to dinner to meet her, it had been the same. The magistrate and his wife from Kokstad, if you please! It was true that they had made up a four for bridge and that he had sat out (because the game always bored him, to tell the truth, though it was plainly his duty to be bored just then), and that sitting-out is a little dull for anyone and practically irresistible in the case of Hugh; and it was true that he had known Mr. Hardcastle for years, who considered him one of "the very best" (which he was) and allowed for it even as Cecil herself did. But there was Mrs. Hardcastle, whom Cecil hated, a very definite lady who did not tolerate any relaxation of party manners in her presence even between friends in Africa. She was right too. Hugh should have considered her. And he should still more have considered his wife.

To-night, however, only Pam sat opposite across the lamplight. Cecil, in the act of frowning, caught her eyes and smiled. Pamela leant forward and pushed the box of cigarettes across to her. Cecil took one and lit it at the lamp. And Pamela smiled secretly, remembering many things. But of these she did not speak. "Come out on to the stoep," she said in a low tone instead. "It's really admirable, his sleeping, for we must make our plans."

The friends got up and went out into the warm evening

air. The stoep at Springfontein is raised but one step from the level of the garden, and the bed underneath, planted with sweet-smelling tobacco plants, sent up to them its magical scent. Cecil was conscious, however, of an irritation which was not to be dispersed so easily as usual. Hugh's sleep had an intolerable air to-night. She pulled a spray of Japanese honeysuckle from a pillar and plucked off the leaves and petals moodily.

"Well," said Pamela, "what are you going to do?"

"Oh I don't know," replied Cecil. "He will hate me to go, and somehow I don't feel as if I can start another battle. Hugh's like a feather-bed, very soft and comfortable, but enervating. Also you can beat it up as much as you like, but still it remains a dead weight."

"My dear," said Pamela, "you are being ridiculous. Very likely he'll be glad to let you go. You want a change; anyone can see that. If he can't take you away himself, it's all the better that I should. Besides, it's only for a few days. And a month ago, he himself suggested your meeting Gwen."

"I know, but that's just like Hugh. He will suggest a thing one day, but the next all the difficulties, mostly imaginary, stare him in the face, and he is completely overwhelmed. He is quite content with everything, you see. I think he wouldn't mind if he never moved off Springfontein again in his life."

"But what in the world are the difficulties here?"

"Well, there's Ronnie. Then he hasn't any petrol for the car, and how am I to get to the station? Then I can't go alone. Then it will be an expense which we can't afford. Then Durban is too full at this time of the year. Then father's meeting Gwen and he did not know that before. Then it will certainly be hot there, too hot for me. And the mail boats are so irregular that we may have to wait days."

Pamela chuckled. "All that's rubbish, and you know it is."

"Of course it's rubbish, but it's what Hugh will say. I shall have to argue every point, to-night, to-morrow, and

every day till I go. You don't know Hugh, though you think you do."

"Well but, my dear, it would be so topping. We could have a day at least all to ourselves before your people come. And I want you to meet Chris too. You'll like him. And besides, if you don't come, I shall have to go back to Three Springs and pick up father, which I don't want to do. Nor will he want to be picked up, for that matter."

Cecil's cigarette glowed as she pulled on it. "I know," she said. "It would be absolutely enchanting. But——"

"There aren't any buts. Tell him you're going—that the thing is settled."

"*You* tell him, then," said Cecil.

"All right, I will." And Pamela turned sharply on her heel and re-entered the room.

"Pam!" cried Cecil hurriedly, but it was too late.

Pamela entered swiftly and much more noisily than was her wont to enter rooms. She went straight over to Hugh, who opened his eyes automatically. "Mr. Sinclair," she said, "you must come and make Cecily behave decently. Listen. I've had a letter from my father to say that my cousin, Christopher Ashurst, is due in Durban on the sixteenth. It seems he is coming on the *Llanstephan Castle*. Father, of course, doesn't want to meet him—you know what he is—and he wants me to go. He thinks Cecily will be meeting Gwen since she happens to be on the *Llanstephan* too, and he suggests I should go down with her and bring Chris up. And now Cecily says she can't go. Can't leave you and Ronnie even for a couple of days! Do come and tell her to be sensible."

Hugh looked into his pipe and found it empty. He got up, searching for his pouch. It was on the floor, and Pamela picked it up for him.

"Oh thanks," he said, "I must have dropped it. Of course Cecil can go. Where is she?"

Cecil came in. "Don't be absurd, Hugh," she said. "How can I leave Ronnie?"

"My darling, Ronnie will be all right. The girls can look after him without you for a couple of days. The only difficulty that I see is that we are out of petrol as it happens. Durban will be very hot, too."

Cecil did not dare to look at Pamela. Pamela, however, chuckled wickedly. "That's just what Cecil said, Mr. Sinclair, and I told her you would get over all those difficulties in a minute. Probably Mr. Hardcastle could lend you some petrol, and even if not, we could drive to Franklin for once. It's not so far as all that. And as to Durban's being hot, well, that doesn't matter for a few days. It will be all the more pleasant when we get back."

Hugh finished filling his pipe and struck a match. He did not care to be hurried, and, at bottom, he did not like Pamela. He never could quite say why, but he did not. She was much too quick for him. He had a feeling that his plans were not quite his own when she had done with them, but it was a muddle that he couldn't disentangle on the spur of the moment. So, now, he still temporised.

"I hardly like asking Hardcastle," he said, "and for goodness' sake remember that it is not as if there were a station at Kokstad. It's the best part of twenty miles in to Franklin, and a rotten bad road from here to Kokstad anyway."

"But you're golfing with him to-morrow," said Pamela, ignoring the last part of his speech, "and it will be a splendid opportunity to ask him. Besides he said only yesterday that he had just got some more in and could lend you a case if you wanted any."

Cecil did not remember the occasion particularly and nor did Hugh, but he, poor man, concluded it might have been during the bridge. He was aware that things had been said to which he had generally assented and so on, but he was not very clear as to details. At any rate there was only one course open at the moment.

"How many days do you expect to be away, Cecil?" he asked cheerfully.

"Oh, Hugh, do you really mean it?" she cried. "It will be

jolly. Pam and I thought we might go down on Wednesday. The boat's due on Thursday, you know. But it is usually a little late these days, and if so we could have a day's shopping. I must get some things, and it will be such a chance."

"To-day is Monday," observed Hugh.

"Yes," put in Pamela quickly, "that gives us heaps of time. We had better write to the Royal to-morrow, Cecily. And I must wire to father."

Cecil was all animation. "I wonder what's on at the theatre?" she cried. "Where's the paper? In this house, one never can find anything. Hugh, didn't you read the paper to-night?"

"No, my darling, I didn't," said Hugh drily. "I couldn't find it. Blandina said she thought you and Miss Urfurd had left it out in the hammock, this afternoon."

"Oh so we did," said Cecil. "Pam, you are careless. That new novel is out there too. I'll go and get them." And she darted to the door.

"The grass will be fearfully wet," called Hugh after her, starting up. "Don't go in those thin shoes; it's madness. I'll fetch them."

"Hugh," called Cecil from the stoep, "you are a fussy old thing. What does it matter if it is wet?" And she disappeared.

Hugh pathetically shrugged his shoulders. Pamela looked as grave as a judge. The two of them walked out into the night and stood waiting, Hugh sucking his pipe. "She's a perfect child," he said.

"I know," said Pamela, "but a very dear one. After all, getting her shoes wet doesn't matter so very much as we must all turn in in a few minutes. It's nearly eleven."

"Is it?" said Hugh. "We dined late, didn't we? But as Cecil forgot to order dinner, it is more of a wonder that we dined at all. Got it, darling?" he added to Cecil who came running up with the paper.

"It's sopping wet," cried Cecil, laughing, "but never mind, we can see all we want." And she ran to the win-

dow to read by the light that filtered dimly out from the lamp.

"You'll hurt your eyes," said Hugh.

Pamela restrained another chuckle with difficulty. "Cecily," she declared, "I'm off to bed. And I shall lock my door. I don't want to get up at half-past six to-morrow. I want tea about eight o'clock. Good-night."

"There's nothing on, Pam," cried Cecil, hurriedly glancing down the columns of advertisements. "What a beastly shame! At least, only the movies. But we can go to them. Anything's a blessed change after this place. Do you remember that adorable man who gave us chocolates last year? You'd gone to the club, Hugh. I told you not to go, but you would, so it wasn't my fault. Are you really going, Pamela? Good-night, dear. No, wait a moment, I'll see you to bed. But why you want to go so early I can't think. I hate going to bed."

Left to himself, Hugh carefully turned out the lamp and shut the door. Then he stole quietly into Cecil's room and lit a candle. Their two beds stood at one end of the room, and next his, a cot. Hugh tip-toed over to it. Little Ronnie lay there dead asleep and hardly seeming to breathe, and the man, carefully shading the light, stood looking down on him. Cecil entering lightly, found him standing so. She crossed to his side, and he put one arm round her waist. "Our baby, darling," he whispered gently.

"He ought to be more tucked up," said Cecil definitely, and she slipped from his arm to arrange the coverings better. As she bent over the child, Hugh lightly touched her hair. Cecil glanced up at him once, and then resumed her tucking up. But he still waited. At last she stood up, and kissed him lightly. "It's a shame to leave you, Hugh," she said, "but it will be only for a day or two and I do so want to go."

"I know, my darling," he said, "and of course you shall. We can get on quite all right. But I expect you're tired; can I help you into bed?"

She kissed him again. "Dear old Hughie," she said. "No, of course you can't. Besides, I'm not a bit tired really. Run away and undress, and don't be long."

He was not long, and when he returned she was only brushing her hair and but half undressed. He pottered about slowly and she knew exactly why. Well, he was a dear, she said to herself, and she would be very nice to him to-night. She took off her kimono and began to remove the rest of her clothes. She knew quite well that he was covertly watching her. She slipped quickly into her nightdress and into bed.

Hugh came over to her side and knelt down, passing one arm round her and with the other stroking her hair. She lay quite still, looking at him. "My darling," he whispered softly, and again, "my darling little girl."

Cecil suppressed a little sigh. She wanted to lie still alone and plan out the golden days at Durban. If she were tired at all, it was of his caresses. But she would be good to him; he had earned it; and after all he was rather a dear, he would take no liberties unless she invited him. "Want to come in a minute?" she asked him.

"May I?" he said.

"Of course, if you like," she answered, and moved to one side a little.

"Do you love me, darling?" he whispered, his face in her hair.

Cecil kissed him, and lay still.

Hugh was up and out while Cecil still slept in the morning, and when he got back at nine for breakfast, she appeared from Pamela's bedroom with her hair down and in her dressing-gown. "Breakfast ready?" he asked.

She danced round him in the wildest of spirits. "I haven't the faintest idea," she said. "Pam's still in bed. Come and kiss her good-morning, Hugh." And she flung her arms round his neck and kissed him, and then seized his hand and dragged him towards Pamela's room. "Really, my darling——" he protested.

Cecil pushed the door open. "Pam," she cried, "here's Hugh wanting his breakfast. He's come to kiss you good-morning. He doesn't think it proper to come to your room at all really, but I had to show him that I was at least more ready than you are."

"Good-morning, Mr. Sinclair," said Pamela coolly. She was sitting up in bed, and on her knees was a writing block and a sheaf of telegraph forms. "I'm composing telegrams. Do come and help me while Cecil hurries up breakfast. Don't worry about me; I only take five minutes to dress."

"Good idea," said Cecil. "Go in, Hugh, and help her." And she pushed him in and hurried off, humming to herself.

Hugh laughed. "I think you can make up telegrams better than I can," he said. "So this jaunt is really coming off, is it?"

"Well, it was settled last night, wasn't it? You overrode all Cecil's objections, you know, and you can't go back on her now. How's Ronnie this morning?"

"He's had his breakfast and is out feeding the fowls," said Hugh. "I'll leave you and just go and have a look at him. Don't be too long, will you? I shall have to spend the morning seeing to the car."

As soon as he had gone, Pamela got leisurely out of bed and glanced out of the window. Then she sauntered over to the mirror and looked at herself amusedly in it. "If you had married Hugh," she said to herself, "you would have died under the strain."

At breakfast Cecil poured out the tea with her usual recklessness. "Hugh," she said, "this morning you must inspect the tree plantations. Pam and I both want to ride and you can take us. You said you had to do it."

"My darling," he remonstrated, "I must see to the car. There's a lot to be looked at. It will take me the whole morning to overhaul it. If you want it to-morrow, it must be done to-day."

"Rubbish, Hugh," cried Cecil, collapsing on her chair. "Really you are too tiresome. There's nothing the matter with the car. Let the boys clean it, and it will do. We must ride this morning."

Hugh cracked his egg. And said nothing. Yet he could not have spoken more plainly.

"Really," said Cecil, "you are dreadful, Hugh. You're like a wet-blanket all the time. It doesn't matter what is suggested, you always either oppose it or else make a huge difficulty out of it. If it's going to be all this trouble, I'd better not go, I suppose."

Hugh laid down his egg-spoon as she began and waited in silence for her completely to finish. Then, magisterially, he said: "My dear Cecil, I'm not opposing your scheme, but you must have some reason. You can't run off to Durban at a moment's notice without making some arrangements. You know perfectly well that there is a great deal to be done. Have you spoken to the girls about Ronnie? Have you been to see the cook? It's not my business, but she told me this morning we were almost out of flour. And what about your packing? Really, it is madness to ride this morning. However, that's your lookout. So far as I am concerned, I shall see that all is ready that I can do."

"I'll interview the cook," said Pamela hastily, hoping to forestall an outburst from Cecil. "I'm good with cooks. The whole tribe of them love me for some reason. And I'll make some scones for tea, if you like, Cecily."

"It's too good of you, Miss Urfurd," said Hugh.

Cecil played with a knife discontentedly, spinning it round in circles until she spun it a little too hard and it fell on the floor. Hugh got up from his seat and retrieved it solemnly, and sat down again. Pamela could have screamed with laughter.

The door opened and an unseen hand admitted Ronnie, who toddled boldly in and marched up to his mother. "Egg," he demanded loudly; "no bread, no butter, egg." He clutched at her skirt with a begrimed hand and beamed at

his father, whose face was just within his line of vision across the table.

"Oh Ronnie," exclaimed Cecil, "where have you been? No, don't touch mummie's dress. Dirty handy!" And then, to the world at large, "He's torn his breeches again! Hugh, really he is awful! He ought to go about like a Kaffir. It seems to me that I spend half my life making Ronnie's knickers. Blandina is too careless. She doesn't mind what he does or where he goes."

"Naughty mummie," said Ronnie.

Cecil uttered an exclamation, caught him up and left the room.

Hugh offered Pamela the marmalade and helped himself. "It's probably the wire of the fowl-run," he said philosophically. "I'm glad he didn't tear his face."

Pamela at last was able to laugh. "You do sound callous," she said. "I must say that for once I pity Cecily. You men don't have to bother about children's clothes, and you don't know what it is."

"Do you?" asked Hugh, smiling.

Pamela reached for the tea-pot. "May I pour myself out another cup of tea?" she said. "Won't you have some more? Well, perhaps you touched me there, but for all that I can sympathise with Cecily. I hate needle-work. I think I should clothe him in leather if I were she. Or nothing, as she says."

"Well," said Hugh, "I'll go and see to the car, if you'll excuse me. I daresay we might ride about eleven if you two are ready. Anyway, I'll order the horses for then. It won't take us more than an hour and a half to ride round the plantations."

He went off, and Pamela sat on sipping her tea. Presently she smiled secretly to herself, and then got up and put Cecil's egg under the cosy. A little later, the wife and harassed mother came in.

She sat down smiling. "Hugh's going to ride, after all," she said. "He came and told me so. He really is a dear.

But he's so horridly annoying. Why in the world can't he fall in with things at once instead of making such a fuss about them? He irritates me beyond words sometimes. He must have known he'd have plenty of time to do his beastly old car. But he's such a dear old thing I never can be angry for long."

"Where's Ronnie?" asked Pamela.

"Blandina's changing his clothes. Will you really see the cook, Pam? Ask her for a list of all she wants and I'll send a cart to town right away. You will be a dear. As soon as I've done breakfast I must see to Ronnie again. But when you come back from the cook, we'll just pack."

Pamela went off to the kitchen, looking in on Ronnie as she went. He was standing in his smock and holding a wooden elephant in his chubby hands. He loved Pamela, and although she said she did not care for children, she had a way of her own with them. "Auntie Pam," he called as soon as he saw her, and made for the door, one foot in his knickers and those unfortunate articles of apparel dragging after him along the floor.

The native girl sat back on her heels and grinned. She, too, liked Pamela.

"L-phant!" declared Ronnie, holding out the wonder.

"So it is, dear," said Pamela, "and you must take him for a walk this morning. Will you? Mummie's ever so busy, and he wants a walk. See, he's trying to eat now," and she ducked the wooden beast's head enthusiastically.

"L-phant, l-phant, Auntie Pam!" cried Ronnie triumphantly.

Pamela spoke rapidly to the girl in Sesuto, and then departed. In the kitchen she restored cheerfulness in five minutes and retired with a list of what was needed. Hugh was in the hall, putting on overalls and looking for his hat. She brought it him.

"This is the kitchen list," she said. "Could you send a boy to town for these things? Cecil is seeing to Ronnie and packing, and I promised her I'd make it out."

"Right," he said, "and eleven sharp for the horses."

Pamela found Cecil in her bedroom, sitting on the floor, the ground strewn with clothes and a trunk open in front of her. She steered through this sea of disorder gingerly and sat down on a bed, crossing her legs and stroking the silk stocking of the limb she nursed. "The list is on its way to town," she said, "Ronnie's feeding his elephant on the lawn, Hugh's cheerful as a bird, and the horses are to be here at eleven. The lark is in the sky and every flower in the garden is lovely."

Cecil sighed. "Pam," she demanded, "do you think I'm a beast to Hugh?"

Pamela considered her, and the litter in which she sat. "My dear," she said, "I should give up attempting to pack a silk petticoat inside a shoe. . . . No, I don't. But nor is Hugh a beast to you."

"I never said he was," said Cecil.

"You didn't, but you meant it."

"I did *not;* he's a dear and I love him. But he does aggravate me. What I want to know is, if I am a beast to be aggravated."

"You are stupid to show it," said Pamela. "And he's rather stupid to stand it," she added.

"I can't help it, Pam," said Cecil sorrowfully. "I don't know why it is, but sometimes I can hardly bear him. I suppose I ought not to say so to you, but I can talk to you, and you're very wise in some ways."

"Thank you," said Pamela. "Hugh isn't."

"What do you mean?" demanded the girl on the floor.

"What you want, my dear Cecily," said Pamela getting up, "is a thorough whipping, metaphorically at any rate, about once a month. Hugh ought to know it and to do it. He's playing with fire not to do it."

"He'd be playing with fire if he did do it!" cried Cecil indignantly.

"He would not be," said Pamela calmly, "not under the circumstances. If you ask me, I think it is his one chance—

but I fear he won't take it. Possibly you'll be whipped all the same, Cecily. But possibly not. Fate is not always kind."

"Pamela," said Cecil dogmatically, "sometimes you talk utter rubbish. This is a time. But if you care to try and explain yourself, I will listen. If not, give up talking and come and help me choose some things for Durban."

Pamela moved over and sat on the floor. "I'll help pack," she said, and took up a crumpled camisole which she proceeded to straighten out.

Cecil snatched it from her. "You'll not pack a thing," she said, "unless you tell me what you meant just now."

Her friend leant back on her hands, as she rather liked doing, and glanced a little sideways at the speaker. "It's a queer world, Cecily," she said. "You and Hugh and your people and lots more, blunder through it, and never seem to see a thing. Why is it that I seem to see? I don't know; and I wish to God I didn't. It's nearly four years now since you and I talked together in my room at Three Springs. I told you then you would marry Hugh, and you have. Have you found what you wanted, Cecily?"

Cecil considered.

"Yes, I think so," she said. "I loved him awfully much, and I still do. Of course it gets a bit different after a while; everyday life is not all a honeymoon; it can't be. But Hugh's an awfully good husband to me. He's a bit dull at times, but in the end, I mostly do as I like. We've never had a real row."

"No," said Pamela, "exactly. And was that what you wanted? It seems to me that you expressed yourself differently then."

Cecil looked puzzled. "Did I?" she said. "I really hardly remember. I know you said beastly things about having babies which, by the way, really aren't true. But what else did I say?"

Pamela drew in her breath sharply and stared at her.

"What a fool I was," she said. "So some one else had told you. Who was it, I wonder? . . . Cecily, let's pack. It's getting late. My dear, you must take this: you look perfectly charming in it." (She held up a gown of rose-coloured silk.) "And remember to wear nothing with it but that moon-stone pendant I gave you. You'll conquer the devil then."

"It's the world I want to conquer," said Cecil, eagerly, reaching for the gown.

"And may," said Pamela to herself, "but what when the flesh comes in?"

They rode at eleven, and Pamela thought, as she often did, that Hugh appeared to better advantage in the saddle than anywhere else. He sat his horse superbly, and was so thoroughly master of himself and it. He was in the best of tempers, too, on horseback and the very perfection of courtesy. It was a dull day, with scraps of fleeting sunshine; and they rode out over the veld to the hill behind the farm which he was planting with firs, oaks, and gums. Mount Currie stood up over against them magnificently, and as they mounted the slope, Kokstad, set in its trees and with its river winding by, showed up clearly at their feet. Far away towards the sea were the Ingeli Mountains, and to the north-west the blue barrier of the Drakensberg. Hugh explained that he was planting the hill in sections year by year, and hoped it would be fully clothed before he died. "It's a little thing," he said with an unusual touch of sentiment, "but somehow it seems to me worth doing if one does nothing else much in life. I want to see this bare hill a real forest before I go. It will be the making of Springfontein. Ronnie will have a grand inheritance."

"Hugh, you give me the creeps," said Cecil. "I can't bear to look so far ahead."

"Don't then, my darling," he said lightly. "Here we are. These are this year's planting, Miss Pamela. I ring each plant in, you see, to keep the cattle off. They're looking well, aren't they? Those are Madagascar pines from

Elandskop. They look as if they will grow here, though I rather feared the cold. Let's hope we don't get too sharp a frost this year."

Cecil was staring out at the distant mountains. "Hugh," she said, "when shall we go properly into the Malutis? You remember how we went first? I got engaged there, Pamela—oh! of course you were with us. What ages ago it seems! But we did not go far enough to please me. Qacha's Nek always fascinates me too. We've motored there once or twice since, Pam; but I'd love to trek on and on into the mountains. Wouldn't you?"

"We must try to get up an excursion," said Hugh. "Possibly your cousin would like it, Miss Pamela."

"I'm sure he would. He's travelled a great deal, but not in South Africa. Ask us both, Mr. Sinclair."

Hugh went off to his golf in the afternoon, and returned in Mr. Hardcastle's car which also brought a spare case of petrol. The two men had a drink or two on the stoep, and then, his visitor leaving, Hugh went in to change for dinner. His dressing-room did not open out of the bedroom, but he looked in to see if Ronnie was asleep. Cecil was standing there, brushing her hair, her dress hanging over a chair waiting to be put on. He put his hands on her bare shoulders and kissed her.

Cecil put down her brush and leant her face against his coat. "You smell of whisky and tobacco," she said, "a nice smell. Hugh, tell me, am I a beast to you?"

The man put his arm round her and kissed her hair. "My darling," he said, "of course not."

"But I am, Hugh. I don't mean to be, perhaps. But you ought to be angry with me sometimes—really angry I mean."

"I don't think I could be, Cecily," he said. "I love you too much."

She sighed a little. "I know you do, Hugh," she said. "Tell me how you love me."

Hugh's arm tightened about her. It was a rare mood for Cecil. He slipped his hand caressingly down her white

back and shoulder, very tenderly. "More than I can say, my darling," he whispered. "You know how I love you."

"What would you do if I ran away from you, Hugh?" she demanded.

He laughed. "Run after you, I expect," he said.

"What with, Hugh? A revolver or a whip?"

"Cecily, darling," he protested, "don't say such things! Don't think them!"

"But I want to know, Hugh," she persisted.

He hesitated. "Darling, it's absurd to pretend such a case. I think I should be broken-hearted—I know I should —but I don't think I should want to hurt you even then. I couldn't, I think, for Ronnie's sake."

She clung to him silently. Then she sighed again. "I know it's silly to ask, but have you ever loved anyone as you love me, Hugh?"

"Never, darling," he said emphatically.

She stroked his coat. "Hugh," she whispered, not looking at him, "have you ever loved—for a little—or wanted perhaps—other women? You know what I mean."

Hugh led her to a chair and sat down, taking her on his knee. "My darling," he said, "what do you mean by asking such things now? Whatever has suggested them? It's a subject upon which you should know nothing. Of course, dear, before I married you, I lived a rough sort of life. I told you so. Most men do. There's even one thing I would like to tell you, now you've asked such questions, a little thing, but a thing I'm very sorry for now. I would like to tell you before you go to Durban. You will hardly believe it, and I don't think you will quite understand."

Cecil looked up quickly and kissed him. "Oh I can guess, dear," she said. "You needn't tell me. I forgive you."

He looked puzzled. "When did you guess, Cecily?" he said. "What is it?"

She blushed. "I don't like to say," she whispered. "Was it something like—well, like that affair of Harold's?"

"My darling girl!" he exclaimed, genuinely horror-struck.

"What do you mean? Good God, I'm not that sort, Cecil. Oh no, but it was just before you came—Gwen—I thought once——. Oh of course, she was only a child, but she was old for her years. But when I saw you, I loved you, dearest, and I've never dreamed of any one since."

"Gwen!" whispered Cecil, white of face. "Oh Hugh!"

"My darling, darling girl, please try to understand. What has come to you, Cecily? It never was anything. I never said a word. I kissed her once or twice, that was all. It was foolish and stupid, of course, but living alone and so on, you don't know how a man can feel about a girl. And then I'd hardly seen you a day when I knew I wanted you and no one else."

Cecil sat up, staring before her. "Gwen," she said again, "Gwen! But oh yes," she went on slowly, "I understand, I suppose. So men are made that way after all. . . . And you kissed Gwen, Hugh? Fancy my not guessing! If I hadn't come, would you have married her?"

Hugh reached out for her hand and kissed it again and again. "Oh, darling," he cried, "what can I say? You don't understand! But anyway, I never should have loved her as I love you. Cecily! Say you forgive me! Say you're not angry!"

"No," said Cecil, "you don't understand. Of course I'm not angry, and after all, there is nothing to forgive. You didn't do wrong, not with Gwen, anyway. It's not that I'm thinking so much about."

"Well, and the others. Really that's all past. Men are easily led away sometimes; I may have imagined myself in love. I can't lie to you, Cecily, but it isn't a thing to think or talk about. Can't we bury it, darling? It's all finished and done with, and now it's just you and I—and Ronnie. And perhaps, one day, there may be another, Cecily darling, do you think so?"

"I was so young. I never understood," said Cecil, as if to herself.

Hugh moved a trifle impatiently, and Cecil got up. Smil-

ing, she bent over him and kissed him, and at that his face lit up. Cecil put her hands one on either side of his head and looked at him, a smile lingering round her mouth. "I have said some stupid things," she said. "You dear old thing."

He caught her by both arms. "And that other, Cecily," he whispered eagerly.

She laughed. "Go and dress," she said. "You'll be late for dinner. Let me get back from Durban and I'll see if you're still good."

He went, closing the door softly after him, and when he had gone, Cecil stood still where she was and the smile faded from her face. "Gwen," she repeated softly, "Gwen. Poor Gwen!"

Hugh did not snore that evening because he had no chance. He was compelled to look out trains and make plans and finally to take a hand at three-handed auction. Then he must needs carry the gramophone into the garden (for fear of waking Ronnie) and set on the records, while Pamela sat smothered in a rug, and Cecil, sitting on a kaross at her feet, leant against her knees.

"Put on 'Beautiful Katie,'" said Pamela at last, sleepily, "and then I shall go to bed."

"Oh no, not that," said Cecil. "I'm dead tired of it. Let's have a fox-trot. The Maxina will do."

Pamela sat up and rubbed her eyes. "You told me you hated fox-trots a day or so ago, Cecily," she said. "And I thought you loved 'Beautiful Katie.'"

"Oh well, that was a day or so ago," said Cecil, "as you say."

Off East London, the *Llanstephan* lay at anchor on a motionless sea. There was a dance on board and the ship was gay with lights. In the hold aft, men worked at cargo, and the cranes creaked and groaned as they swung cases and bales into the lighter alongside; but forrard, in front of the wind-screen, it was quite quiet. The music of the band

came faintly to a couple standing there, their eyes on the twinkling lights of the little town.

"I wonder if you'll like Africa," said the girl.

"Africa!" laughed the man. "I like your cheek! All you South Africans talk as if there were no other Africa than the Union. But if its people are like those I've met on board, I know I shall."

"Will you," murmured his companion, after the time-honoured manner of travellers, "that's very sweet of you."

Christopher Ashurst slipped his arm round her waist, and she did not move away. He had been manœuvring for that for some minutes. "Shall I be able to see more of you?" he asked softly.

"I don't know," she said. "I shall go straight on to Maritzberg. It depends on yourself."

"I shall visit Maritzberg the moment I can shake off my cousin," he declared, "and I shall come and call. Hark, that's the last dance. Let's have it, shall we?"

She turned silently to take his arm, and the movement brought them face to face. A stray ray of light fell on her red-gold hair. They stood so a minute, and then he bent and kissed her. "You shouldn't," she murmured, unresisting, "some one might see."

"There's no one about," he said.

He was wrong. Gwen happened to see and to hear; a wind-screen is a poor shelter in reality. She was nineteen, and not so inexperienced as Cecil had been. She only smiled.

CHAPTER II

GWEN had come, and they were all staying at the Royal. That evening, dressing for dinner, Cecil had just clasped the moon-stones which Pam had given her round her neck when her sister came in. Gwen had become a tall girl, but in a way her years in England seemed to have made little impression on her. She had gone too late for that, with an impress already stamped upon her character, and had merely come back to resume the old life with the assurance of nineteen years. "Ready, Cecil?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Cecil. "There, Gwen, what do you think of the moon-stones and this frock?"

Her sister surveyed her critically. "Marriage seems to have suited you, Ces," she said. "Your figure looks to be as good as when I admired it on the sands—remember?—and you look not a day older. Also you're as excited at the prospect of meeting a few men down below as if you were still a schoolgirl. No, more, for when you were a schoolgirl you pretended to care for none of these things."

Cecil laughed and kissed her, taking her arm and leaning against her so that they both appeared in the glass. "Wait till you're married," she said. "A couple of days off like this seems bliss. Ronnie is an angel of course, but children are a worry, Gwen. It would be awful to have to face the prospect of a baby a year for the greater part of one's life, like a washer-woman or a Kaffir. How they manage it, I can't think."

"How you manage it not, I can't think," said Gwen, coolly.

"Gwen," said Cecil magisterially, "you don't seem to have changed much, but I know a great deal more than I used to know and I know quite well that girls of your age shouldn't

ask such questions or say such things. Come on; let's get down."

"How's Hugh?" asked Gwen carelessly, as they left the room. "There has been so much to say that I don't believe I've asked properly. At least, on the quay, you didn't give me any details."

"How could I, my dear? You were firing fifty questions at once at me. Besides I said 'all right.' So he is." Cecil spoke a trifle shortly.

"Dear me, Ces," said Gwen, passing under the palms of the Ulundi Court and dodging a branch that threatened her hair, "you're not only married and a mother, but a blasée woman of the world already. When I left for England, you used to go into raptures over a question of that sort. Hugh was always either 'anxious' or 'tired' or 'perhaps not quite as well as usual' according to you, but now he's 'all right' only. By the way, why didn't he come with you to meet me? If I had married a wife like you and I were a man, I wouldn't allow you to flutter off alone to Durban! Trust me!"

They had passed through the lounge by now and were out on the stoep, that stoep from which one gets the best impression of the town of Durban. It is high above the road, the Post Office opposite, the Town Hall on the right, and one can look out across the central square with its pretty garden of palms and trees, the lights, cars, rickshaws, and passers-by beneath, giving one a sense of life and movement. True, all this means little to an Englishman fresh from Europe, but it means a great deal to a man from some lonely veld farm. It meant a great deal to Cecil. She loved the country, yes, and would have lived nowhere else, but the blood of youth ran in her veins and she was hardly to be blamed if she realised how exceedingly pleasant she was to the eyes of men. So she loved the stir of things here, and as the sisters stepped out into the bright lights and threaded their way through the lane of long cane chairs, Cecil laughed more heartily at her sister's words than they demanded.

She had an infectious laugh, and most men glanced at her as she passed. Two, from the corner where they had been sitting with Pamela, watched them as they came, and rose to greet them. One was Jimmy Eldred who had come to meet his daughter. The other was Chris.

Now it is a hard thing to describe the meeting of Cecil Sinclair and Christopher Ashurst. Outwardly, it was nothing. Pamela murmured: 'My cousin Christopher, Cecily,' and: 'This is Mrs. Sinclair, Chris, who came up with me,' and the two shook hands conventionally, seating themselves easily in a couple of chairs facing the street on Pamela's right while Jimmy Eldred engaged his daughter in talk. But months later they told each other that there was something more than this hidden there beneath the outward form of their greeting—told each other so while a wet wind whirled mists round them on a crag of the Basuto mountains. As it was, now, Cecil shook his hand, sat down, and glanced out at once into the street. She noticed little things in detail as if they were of immense importance: that it had rained a little and that the streets shone; the horns on a bedecked rickshaw boy's head; that it was exactly 7.49 by the clock; that a man coming up the steps to the hotel was wearing an opera hat. And all the time, she was wanting to stare into this man's eyes and greet him familiarly. "We have met at last, have we?" she would have said. "Oh I'm so glad. I was afraid we might miss. Let's go straight away from these people at once and talk, shall we? There's so much to say."

And Chris? Well, Chris was what is known as a man of the world, but a man who had retained the eagerness of a child with something of the child's ability to dive beneath the surface of things. And he was saying to himself something like this: "By Jove, what a topping girl! What is it now, my dear, that strikes me so about you? Not your dress (though it is very pretty if I had time to stop and consider it); not your moon-stones (though on your throat they enchant me); not your figure particularly, nor your face,

wonderful as they both are; and certainly not your conversation, for you hardly speak. What then? You, you witch, just you! You are you and I am I, and—well, thank God we've met!"

Neither, of course, said any such thing, for whatever gods or fates order the world have left this class of understanding singularly incomplete. Knowing so much at times with so strange an intuition, why should we not know more, or at least have a sense with which to express it to one another? No one's life is wholly without such a meeting, and yet as a rule we are convention-tied, and pass and do not speak. Thus Chris had no idea that Cecil saw anything in him, and Cecil pretended to herself that Chris saw nothing in her. Yet at table each was as conscious of the other as if they two had been there alone, and afterwards they sat together while the band played, and talked together, drawn aside, as it were, now and again, by the others, but returning naturally to each other.

Cecil was hard at work all the time on a kind of analysis. She was really fighting a battle already lost. She kept asking herself 'what is it about him?' and hardly listening in a way to the run of his talk at all. He seemed to her completely self-possessed, cool, almost insolent. He was always, of course, perfectly polite, but she felt that he would always have that way with him in company with a woman, and that beneath the glove was an iron hand. Nor was it merely that she knew from Pamela and from his conversation that he was a man who had travelled much and seen his world; she knew from his manner that he had probed most mysteries and proved them to be lies. In both these things he was a direct contrast to her husband. Hugh had adored her as if she were a goddess, and he treated all women as if they were royal; this man spoke to her as if she were merely a woman and he a man who had seen plenty of women. She felt small beside him, but she had an incredible desire to show him that she was not small at all, to arrest him in his easy-going carelessness, and to see him at her feet. Now

and again he exchanged sentences with Pamela, and she could hardly bear his doing so. She knew in a flash that he and Pamela understood each other. Their words crossed like rapiers. Pamela had that same veiled insolence of manner that he had. Pamela was easy and cool as he was easy and cool. But Cecil knew herself to be almost feverish and certainly exalted. She was a woman—hot, full-blooded; not a calm devil like Pamela. And he was the man she had been wandering down the years to meet.

Maybe she would not have put her thoughts into those words, but then Cecil was never good at words. But she did say to herself, again and again, staring at the street, at the band, at him even, at Pamela, "I shall fall in love with this man. It is done, written, settled. I shall fall in love with this man. . . ." And the thing was so great that, though she was not without religion, she never stopped to ask herself if it were right, and so amazingly and indubitably new that, though she had known Hugh three years, she had within her no sense at all of wonder.

On the other hand, Chris exerted himself, which he did not always trouble to do. Gwen, for instance, who had seen him every day for three weeks, was surprised at him. Up to the present, quite frankly, she had disliked him, and chiefly, though she would not have allowed it, because he hardly gave her a look, or, if he spoke to her, spoke because he wanted to do so and not because she wished him to speak. And indeed she had wished him to speak to her—most of the women on board had so wished. Besides, he had chiefly spoken to that red-headed fool of a clergyman's daughter from Maritzberg whom he had kissed so coolly. One can sympathise with Gwen. He might have kissed her instead, if he had wanted to do so; but he had not wanted. To a woman that is the unpardonable sin.

On the stoep that evening, Cecil had the first liqueur of her life, in itself a little thing, but to her afterwards a parable. The Indian waiter had brought the coffee, and it was Chris of course who said: "What about liqueurs? Pamela,

what'll you have? Oh, at least, I beg your pardon, Mrs. Sinclair, what will you have? It's your first call. Cognac? Chartreuse?"

"Oh no thanks," said Cecil. "I don't care for one."

"Really? But you ought, you know; this is an occasion."

She glanced at him. His eyes were laughing and challenging hers. There was something infectious about them, though she did not know what. She felt suddenly very gay. "Well, perhaps," she said, "but ask Pamela."

He smiled and turned to his cousin. "Decide for us, then, Pamela," he said.

"Van der Hum," said Pamela. "You should try it, Chris. It's South African, and don't you always try new things in a new country?"

"Rather," he said. "Let it be—what do you call it?—Van der Hum. One-two-three-four, Miss Eldred?—and now five, Mrs. Sinclair, do!"

Cecil nodded. "Five Van der Hums," said Chris.

He leaned back a little towards her. "Have you ever eaten snails?" he asked mysteriously.

She shook her head, laughingly.

"You shouldn't laugh. It's a solemn subject. Snails are so good. I'm hoping these Van der Hums, which sound even more perplexing, will come up to them."

"I hope they will," she retorted, "for the honour of South Africa which appears to be engaged. But why is the subject so solemn?"

"Eats and drinks are always solemn subjects to true Englishmen, Mrs. Sinclair," he said. "Haven't you noticed? But I confess I'm a renegade. I always eat and drink what I can't get at home, and the risk adds a zest to life."

She took in his clean-shaven clear-cut face, his rather untidy hair, and his air of boyishness. "So in Rome you do as Rome does, do you?" she asked.

"Yes. If you want to find out other people's points of view and philosophy, you must. That is the joy of travel, I think. Do you like it?"

"The chance does not come my way," said Cecil, and could not help the note of bitterness in her voice. "Tell me."

He regarded her seriously. "I'm an incorrigible rover," he replied. "I should never sit still more than a year or two in one place if I could help it. People say the world is small, and so it is, but it is still big enough for most lifetimes. I should like to feel that I had seen most things and been to most places before the end."

"Wouldn't it be rather boring afterwards?" asked Cecil, smiling.

"If there were an afterwards. But I hope there won't be. I want to wander till I drop and then to be buried where I fall, 'a hunter home from the hill.'"

His voice had hardened a little. Cecil noticed it. For the life of her she could not help carrying the conversation a step further. But she put it humorously. "Then wandering means more to you than a wife, Mr. Ashurst?" she said.

In a moment she wished she had not said that. There was a perceptible silence and his eyes would not leave her face. Absurd as it was, she felt as if she had broached with this stranger a subject which might become personal to them both at his next words. But she had no need to fear. His face relaxed. He picked up his little liqueur glass and looked at her quizzically across it. "Well, you see, Mrs. Sinclair, your sex is charming, but I, alas, I have never been able sufficiently to charm!"

The statement seemed so obviously untrue that Cecil laughed outright. Chris shook his head solemnly. "Don't laugh, Mrs. Sinclair," he said. "I assure you it's no laughing matter. But still perhaps the fault is also in myself. I'm an inconsequent beggar. I can't plan for years ahead, or lay up for old age, or devise heritages for my children, like most sane people. I wasn't made that way."

"But isn't the alternative loneliness?"

"Oh I don't know. Earth bred us and earth's our home, and all its peoples are our peoples. But I don't see why one should want to found a family—what end there is in per-

petrating oneself, so to speak. To leave a world-legacy, a book, a poem, a picture, yes; that's fine; but merely a child, no. Fancy watching all one's mistakes and all one's omissions coming out in its character!"

"The child might write the book, or a better one," objected Cecil.

"Or be cut off in a war, or die in a lunatic asylum, or fall a victim to alcohol!"

Cecil laughed. "I'm a mother," she said. "You forget that."

Chris leant a little towards her. "Are you," he said. "I didn't know. Are you glad? It must be very strange to be a mother. It satisfies perhaps. Does it?"

He spoke naturally, and seemed to see nothing unusual in the question, but Cecil suddenly saw her world in a new light. She had never thought of it before in that way. She glanced swiftly at her questioner to see if he were mocking her, but plainly he was not. So she evaded the direct answer. "You must see my son," she said.

He nodded, but moved restlessly. "Does it sound rude? I'm not sure that I want to. Do you know, when you came in, you gave me an impression—a purely subjective one. As a rule, one can tell in a moment if a woman is married, but I should not have known in your case. I'll flatter you; you're so youthful, Mrs. Sinclair. Do have another cigarette, will you?"

Cecil was glad of the interruption. She changed the subject. "Are you staying in South Africa long, Mr. Ashurst?"

"I don't know," he said. "I write, you know, and one place is as good as another to me in a way. All places and people are grist to the mill. But I think I shall stay for some months. I like what little I've seen so far of your country. It is jolly here, for example, and unlike other places. Durban is very much of a town, a go-ahead town too I should say, and yet the Kaffirs in the street suggest that the edge of civilisation is not far beyond the city boundaries. Pamela says Three Springs is really on the confines, or be-

yond them. You know it, I expect. Do you live near? Do tell me about it."

Cecil did not want to talk. She wanted just to sit still and listen. "You'll see soon," she said.

"But are you near?" he persisted.

"No," she said, "not near, but within a day's journey in a car. We are near Basutoland, you know, and you ought to go there. Perhaps we shall see you at Springfontein some day." And she moved a little, in the almost imperceptible way women have when they wish politely to indicate that it is time to include the others in the conversation.

Chris glanced at them. They had pulled their chairs round a little to see something of the square also, and so had to a degree isolated themselves. He therefore refused the hint. Indeed he very bluntly refused it.

"I ought I suppose," he said, "to go and talk to my charming cousin for a bit, but I don't want to and I shan't. Not unless you order me off, that is. Do you know you are a delightful person to talk to? Some folk obviously talk because it's a social duty after dinner, but all the time you can feel that they don't care a scrap whether one talks of mice or of men, cabbages or customs. You have to go carefully not to say a wrong thing—something that will shock or scare them, and it is the most mournful business I know. The hardest apostolic maxim is the command to suffer fools gladly."

"I'm inclined to think you rarely fulfil it," she said, laughing.

"Oh yes, I do," he replied. "It's all part of the business. If one were perpetually unsociable one might never meet the people to whom one can and wants to talk. Why, you forget what I told you. Try everything, adventure everywhere, avoid nothing, otherwise you miss the reality of life—that's my motto."

"That might be dangerous doctrine," said Cecil.

He nodded seriously. "Well yes, perhaps," he said, "but danger is the spice of life. Besides one can be a Bohemian,

for example, without actually wading into the neck like François Villon, or interested in life without cultivating the vices of Oscar Wilde. Though I don't mean one should play with things. It's no good playing with realities; if you do you see nothing truly of them. People are tricked by the shadows of reality so often. Religion, love, hate, liberty—we play with them! Still more, they play with us. Don't you think so?"

Cecil hardly knew what he meant, yet his words moved her very deeply. This was not the talk of her own or her father's house. Almost as if fascinated she raised her eyes to his, and, as it seemed to her, allowed him to look deep down into them. "Perhaps they do," she said, and there was a shade of wistfulness in her voice. Christopher was far too acute an observer not to notice it, and they came nearer in that moment to a passing of the great divide that conventional meeting sets up than at any other time that night. But something in her face held the man back. He looked away, and a long silence fell on them. And in the very silence Cecil knew herself to be content.

Pamela turned in her chair. "Well, you two," she said, "have you talked yourselves out? Come over here and let's map out a programme for to-morrow."

Cecil pulled her chair an inch or two forward. "I must get back," she said.

"Why?" queried Pamela. "Cecily darling, do listen to me for once. Here's the ship got in on Thursday to time when you know we quite expected she wouldn't be in till Friday. Wherefore Hugh doesn't even expect you till Saturday evening. Consequently you can take all day to-morrow with an easy conscience. Next, Mr. Eldred has his car here, and he says he can easily take the lot of us out on Saturday. That will save you a beastly railway journey to begin with, and do you good to go on with. But you can't get from Elandskop to Springfontein the same day, so I propose you come on with Chris and me to Three Springs for Saturday night. Father will meet us at Elandskop. And behold, on Sunday, we motor you back to Springfontein. At the most

you're a day late, but it's really not a day. Isn't that a magnificent plan?"

"Oh do, Ces," cried Gwen. "I want a day in this jolly old place again. I want a really amusing trippery day, a bathe in the enclosure in the morning—if it's there, that is. Is it, dad? Yes? Well, that's good. You must know, Mr. Ashurst, that the bathing enclosure here is broken by the sea every other month, when sharks and things of that sort get in, and bathing is forbidden by the city fathers until it's mended again. But we're in luck, it seems. And I want to sail round the bay and see it again, and eat sundaes at the Model Dairy, and drive back in a rickshaw, and go to the Coliseum in the evening. It's such fun to be back. Don't you remember what fun you thought it, Ces? Do stay!"

"I'll wire Hugh," said Mr. Eldred with a smile. "That will square it all right, Cecil."

Chris said nothing.

"Will you, dad?" cried Cecil eagerly. "Oh, then, I think I can. I'd love it. But when I got home, Gwen, I wanted the country and not the town."

"I want it too," said Gwen, "but we're here now, and I belong to Durban more than you did. London is nothing in comparison with Durban!"

Cecil sighed. "Rubbish, Gwen," she said. "I'd give anything to see London again."

"Make Hugh take you then," said Gwen.

"My dear child, you don't know what you're talking about," said Cecil. "Probably we shall go some day, but not till Ronnie's bigger. In any case Hugh is as hard to move as—as—well, as his own farm."

"You don't allow for that farm enough, Ces," said her father. "I understand Hugh entirely. When you've built most of it and planted all of it, you don't want to leave it to Kaffirs even for six months. When I was last in England, I wanted to get back after the first fortnight. Don't you agree with me, Ashurst?"

"I've never had a farm," said Chris, "and I'm afraid I

don't want one. I confess I'm on the other side. Once a year at least I want to stand at Piccadilly Circus and eat a dinner in the Trocadero. It's a weakness, I allow. Besides I think I feel much the same about Paris; one in every two years at any rate I want to drink a *café noir* and *petit verre* in view of the Madeleine. But I don't think much of a year in which you can't sleep out some months under the stars. As for Durban, I know what Miss Eldred means and I sympathise. I should like to be introduced to all those charms she mentions. Doubtless a sundae tastes differently in the Model Dairy from a sundae anywhere else. It certainly will to me, since I confess I have never tasted one anywhere. What in the world is it anyway?"

Cecil got up. "With such a programme before us," she said, "I think it's time to turn in."

"So do I," said Pamela, hiding a yawn. "Durban, with all your praise, Gwen, is distinctly hot after Griqualand. And sleepy."

"I shan't sleep a wink," declared Gwen.

"Oh you will," said Mr. Eldred. "Take her off, Cecil. And don't you three sit up talking till morning."

The girls said good-night and went off. "Have a night-cap?" suggested Eldred to Ashurst and ordered whiskies and soda. The waiter brought them, in his silent Indian fashion, and Eldred filled up the chit. "Would you have cared to come round to the club, Ashurst?" he asked. "I'm sorry I didn't think of it before. I'll put you up to-morrow. It'll be useful to you while you are about here. The Durban club is quite excellent you'll find."

"Thanks," said Chris. "It would be useful as I expect I shall run up here fairly often. Is Urfurd a member?"

"Yes, but he rarely comes to town. He's a queer fellow, as doubtless you know. Still every man has his own life to lead, and if he wants to do it in one way, I fail to see why other people should object. However, what are your plans? Here's to the best," he added, raising his glass.

Chris nodded across the table. "Cheerio," he said, and put

his glass down. "I haven't any very definite plans," he went on. "I promised Urfurd years ago I'd come and look him up, and I never have, though I'm a rolling stone. Now that I'm here I may as well see as much of the country as possible. Then I want to get some shooting if I can, and have a look at the mines, the Falls, Mont aux Sources, and so on."

"If you want to shoot," said Eldred, "try Zululand and the border of Portuguese East Africa. You go to Semkele, a day by train from here"—and the talk drifted off into shooting stories and plans.

The girls said very little to each other for once. Pamela, at Cecil's door, stopped a minute, but she looked into Cecil's face and said in her abrupt way, "Dear, you're dog tired. I shan't come in, and I'll see Gwen to her room for you. Good-night," and then she took Gwen's arm and walked her off.

"It's nice to have you about again, Gwen," she said when they were alone. "I don't see so much of Cecily now, or not as much as I did when first she came home. That's natural, of course, but I miss her. Let's talk for a little; I haven't had a chance for a word with you really. Did you enjoy the voyage? Anybody interesting on board?" And she settled herself into an easy chair.

"Yes, your cousin I suppose. He led everything."

"Oh he would," said Pamela. "I haven't seen much of him, you know—a summer holiday in France and a visit or two in England—but we write to each other rather more than cousins usually do, and you can learn to know Chris from his letters. Especially when there are his books to teach you as well."

"I like that about him, I must say," said Gwen. "He isn't for ever talking of his books."

"And what don't you like?"

Gwen took off her dress and hung it up in the wardrobe. Then she slipped on her kimono, sat down on the bed and finally threw herself back in it.

"Well, now," said Pamela again, "what don't you like?"

"You are his cousin; I hardly like to say," said Gwen.

Pamela laughed. "Oh my dear," she said, "don't worry about me. Tell me. You won't offend me whatever you say, and you certainly won't prejudice me against him unduly. You are quite entitled to your opinion, but so am I to mine."

Gwen was a little annoyed. This was the Pamela she resented. It was, she thought, as if Pamela had said, 'Of course I don't care in the least *what* you think.' An older woman would have punished her by saying nothing—a really subtle revenge, but Gwen was only an impulsive girl. She determined to be almost rude; Pamela had asked for it. "He's a born lady-killer," she said, "and knows it. He flirted abominably on board with a ginger-haired girl from Maritzberg. Quite by chance I saw him kiss her the last night. Oh! I shouldn't have said that!"

"Why not?" demanded Pamela. "I take it it was truly by chance you saw them."

Gwen flushed. "But it isn't cricket to give him—and her—away."

Pamela raised her eyelids a fraction. Then she smiled. "It doesn't matter in Chris's case," she said. "I should think he probably kissed half a dozen girls in those three weeks. It's second nature to him. It's what makes him so interesting."

"I don't understand," said Gwen. "Interesting?"

"Of course. If I were you I should have set out to make him want to kiss me, and then I should have steadily refused him. A man who has kissed nobody is no conquest. Anyone can seduce a saint; it's something worth trying to reform a rake."

Gwen shifted on her bed, crossed her legs, and swung one in the air impatiently. "Then you'd better try," she said. "He certainly wants reforming. But I'm afraid I'm not so interested in men at all. Anyhow you will have Mr. Ashurst at Three Springs quite long enough to make him want to kiss you."

Pamela got up. "My dear," she said, "Chris and I were through with all that together years ago. But don't be absurd, Gwen. Men are extremely interesting. The interest there is between men and women is half the interest there is in the world, and perhaps more. When the world loses it, the world will commit suicide. But there is not much sign of that yet, on the whole. I must go. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Gwen without getting up. The door closed. "Oh lor'," said Gwen to herself, "I wish there was somebody else at Three Springs."

Cecil got rapidly into bed, and cuddled down into the sheets as she liked to do. She thought she would have a long think. It began with a consideration that the next day would be jolly, and it ended almost as soon as it began.

The next day was jolly however. Everybody was in the best of tempers, and even Gwen and Pamela appeared to hit it off. Gwen's pleasure at getting paw-paw for breakfast again, began it. Then they met some people from the ship, and all went off to the beach together to bathe. They were photographed in the surf, and they had the sundaes, several of them, at the Model Dairy. Chris asked the waitress after the cows, and insisted on going off with Gwen in an absurd attempt to find the centre of milking operations. When the proprietor appeared (or his representative), he merely asked him to dinner. They trammed round the Berea and they visited the Zoo, where Pamela made instant and amazing friends with a baboon who appeared to be positively broken-hearted on any threat of hers to leave. Chris said it was her only conquest and she should be proud of it, since any woman could tame a man but very few could conquer a monkey. At this Gwen could not restrain her laughter, and when asked why, refused to say. It seemed, however, that Pamela understood.

Cecil said that she wanted to do some more shopping, and, when pressed, admitted that it was knickers for Ronnie she had in mind. They therefore went shopping for knickers in a body, till Mr. Eldred could stand it no longer and bolted

off to the club taking Christopher with him. Left to themselves, the girls inspected a large number of things that they remembered they wanted to buy, and finally bought a few things they did not want. They strolled on to the Parade and purchased seats at the theatre for the evening's performance. And they ascended to the Royal through the gardens at the back, and were finally discovered by the men drinking cherry brandies on the stoep.

Ashurst proved himself the best of company at the cinematograph. He sat between Pamela and Cecil, and merely imitated the ordinary observer. Chris cheering the hero was bad enough, but Chris weeping over the fall (that didn't quite come off, as he put it) of the heroine, was altogether too much for Cecil. He really acted extraordinarily well, not over-doing it, but being apparently moved almost to tears. They left a little before the end by mutual consent. To continue to laugh was impossible.

Outside, Gwen decided for them that it should be a question of rickshaws. Chris summoned one and crowded Eldred, Gwen and Pamela in. He had charge of the party by now and no one thought of disobeying him. It was lost in the darkness before he found a second. He helped Cecil in. "It's a glorious night," he said. "Do let's go along the Parade first."

"Do you think we ought?" asked Cecil.

Chris leant over her and tucked the rug in. The very action was a caress, she thought, and a caress that already seemed natural. Cecil felt that if this strange man took her hand, even if he kissed it, it would not seem remarkable. But he was not in the least demonstrative; he did not attempt to flirt as she would have used the phrase; and he was apparently entirely unaware that she felt him to be different from other men she had met. When he answered her, however, it was with that cool, almost insolent air that she had felt the evening before.

"Ought?" he queried then, "what oughts or ought nots are there in life, I wonder, except those of our own imaginings?"

The lights of the ships in the harbour twinkled over the still waters, and on the Bluff the great eye of the lighthouse gleamed and faded and gleamed again, steadily. A little wind blew across the bay, and the branches of the coco-nut palms planted along the road rustled above them. Otherwise it was very still. The boy's bare feet made little noise, and the rubber tyres of their rickshaw slipped easily over the ground. Occasionally a bell tinkled at a corner and another rickshaw hurried by, but except for that they passed swiftly along in a kind of magical isolation.

"There are at least the Commandments," said Cecil, and it did not seem unnatural that in a moment they two should pass from the trivial talk of the evening to deeper things.

"I wonder," he said again. "Sinai was imagination too, I think. The priests of late Israel, anxious to have divine approval behind their codes, wrote up the thunder and the lightning and the quakings. Very likely in good faith. And they succeeded. They have imposed the story on the world for three thousand years. It has been a dreadful spectre, but if you look closely it is little more than a hollowed turnip and a candle-end!"

Cecil was silent. Such an interpretation had never occurred to her, and was, as a matter of fact, beyond her. But it was as if something within had cried that he was right, that she had been waiting for this.

"No," he went on, and hardly as if to her, "that which commands a man must have something stronger behind it than that. 'Adam knew Eve'; 'Cain rose up and slew his brother'; 'Elijah girded up his loins and ran';—there are deep things. Deep calling to deep—passions, loves, hates. I know of no commandments to order these. Only love can control them. God made man, but He breathed His own spirit into him. He made a man, but He quickened, for good or ill, a god."

"The world would be impossible if we all acted on such ideas," said his companion.

"Do you find it so possible now?" he demanded. "I do not."

The boy turned up towards Smith Street. Half way up, he slowed down almost to a walk because of the steep incline, and Chris leant forward to help him. "I must say I pity these boys," he said in a different tone. "They make money, I suppose, but they pay for it with their lives in the end. Why should we white people teach them our own false exchange?"

Cecil laughed. "You're in a very critical mood, Mr. Ashurst," she said.

"Am I? I always am, I think. The world hasn't been particularly good to me, up to date. It offers all sorts of nice things, but they mostly turn out to be like the rickshaw boy's bargain in the end."

"You were not so pessimistic last night," said Cecil. "I rather gathered then that you loved the world and all things in it."

"It is you who must not be so critical now," he retorted, smiling. "Besides truth is always contradictory. But I did not say I loved it. I'm interested in men and things and places—very, but it has all been a shadow-show so far."

It was Cecil, then, who said the first provocative thing. "Do you see no signs of anything better, Mr. Ashurst?" she asked.

But despite the character Gwen had given him, he did not take advantage of the opening. And yet his answer, spoken as the boy stopped in front of the hotel, did not displease her. "Hope escaped from Pandora's casket as well as all the ills, you know, Mrs. Sinclair," he said.

Cecil felt Pamela's eyes to be resting on her as they climbed the steps. Instinctively she crossed over to the side on which her friend was sitting and pulled a chair up near her. Chris, paying off the boy, slipped into a seat next Gwen with a tragic air. "I shall not sleep to-night," he declared; "indeed I doubt much if I shall ever sleep again. I

am convinced that Veronica's cowboy could not have escaped. Lions, yes; Red Indians, yes; express trains when he was bound hand and foot on the rails, yes; but the eyes of that terrible woman—what was her name? Oh, yes, Cynthia—Cynthia with the peroxide hair, never."

"Oh do be quiet," said Gwen, laughing again. "We were just getting over it all. Why did you two come back at all? Father, order something for Mr. Ashurst, please. Poor Cecil, you must have had a bad time in your rickshaw."

"Your sister would have it that there was hope," groaned Chris, "but I could not believe her. Still, there does remain whisky. I entirely agree with you, Eldred, that the moment, long expected, has at last come."

Gwen gave a mock sigh. "Men are poor creatures," she said. "Without drinks and constant tobacco, they do not appear to be able to live."

"They have to move among women, Miss Eldred, you forget that," said Chris. "But I take the hint; will you have a cigarette?" And he offered her his case.

"If *you* smoke so much, Gwen, your mother will be horrified," said Mr. Eldred. "But I see you need one now. You ought not to attempt to spar with Mr. Ashurst. He's more than your match, my dear."

"No, no, you're wrong," said Chris quickly. "Your daughter has kept me in my place for three weeks, Eldred, and I only survive by adventitious aids."

On the morrow, in the car, the two men sat in front and the three girls behind. Pamela and Gwen did most of the talking, sparring now and again to Cecil's amusement, but she kept very quiet. Motoring usually had that effect upon her. It was pleasant to be so near the earth—not to feel one's self removed from it as one does in a train, and yet to speed along so swiftly and so comfortably. When one walks, one is subject to the laws of the earth; its moods make all the difference; its hills mean sweat and toil; its pleasant places are gifts. But in a car, one is divine. The world is

subdued. If it offers good things, one can accept if one will; if otherwise, one can scorn them. Yet man is a poor sort of a god. A tin-tack will destroy his empire.

But Cecil had much to think about. She was travelling the road she and her father had passed over three years before. Week had followed week and she had not seemed to change, but this reminder suddenly apprised her of the change they had wrought in her. It seemed scarcely possible that three years could have made such a difference. Wife and mother; well, of course those were big things. She told herself that they were enough in themselves to account for it. But she knew it was not so. It seemed to her that she had become a wife and a mother incidentally as it were: had grown into them. They had brought ecstasy, yes; pain, oh yes; but both had been passing things which had come and had gone, leaving her changed, true, but still Cecil. Yet now she hardly felt as if she were the Cecil of three years ago at all. Why? Why? Why? The whirr of the engines cried it to her, but the passing landscape had no answer.

Fate, indeed, scrawled a reply in front of her in rough fashion, but she could not read the writing. At a turn, Eldred had to brake suddenly for a tiny naked tot of a native child straggling across the road. On the instant, a woman leapt from a thicket of young wattle, snatched it up, cast one frightened glance at them, and fled. Chris, leaning round, caught her eyes, and smiled. She smiled happily back. The car sped on.

CHAPTER III

OH don't, Pam!" cried Cecil, "don't! don't!"

The three of them stood in Pamela's cave, whither they had come after an early breakfast the next morning. The arrangement had been that Cecil should at once take the road for home, but Mr. Urfurd begged her not to start before midday as he particularly wanted to finish some writing. Cecil consoled her conscience with the thought that as she was guest and he host, she could hardly object; and when Pamela had proposed a visit to the cave, she had jumped at it. Pamela had said that it was Sunday, and that as they could not go to church they would pay a visit to Anubis. This had naturally aroused Chris's interest, which deepened with all he heard. Easily enough, then, the three of them had set off together.

It was a fair and golden morning when they started, but had clouded over later. Now the air felt heavy and oppressive, and the discovery of Nanea, sitting there in the lip of the cave among the bushes as if waiting for them, had brought things to a climax. Chris had seen her first, and had uttered an exclamation of astonishment. He well might have done.

Nanea had pushed the bushes back from Pamela's skeleton and was sitting at its head. She was wearing only a Zulu girl's belt and squatting on her hams. In her hands was the skull of the figure, and she was staring into its eyeless sockets.

Pamela had come forward instantly and had spoken sharply to her. She had answered, but without lifting her eyes. Then the white girl had looked back quickly at Chris and said: "This is Nanea, the daughter of a native wizard,

and really an extraordinary creature. I hypnotise her at times, and should like to do so now. You'll see something interesting, Chris."

"My word, Pamela," he had said, stepping eagerly up, "I did not know you went in for that sort of thing. Certainly; give us an exhibition." And then with a smile and a backward glance at Cecil: "We do cross the edge of civilisation up here, apparently."

Cecil had stood still for a moment, uncertain, and in that moment Pamela began. She had gone round to the feet of the skeleton, and then, looking across it, had caught and held Nanea's eyes with her own. "Nanea!" she had called sharply, "you know me? Good. Then sleep—you are tired—very tired—you cannot keep your eyes open—sleep—sleep—sleep. . . ."

From where she stood Cecil could not see the native girl's face, but suddenly a sense of the situation fell on her with an almost physical horror. Her friend in her long fawn coat and riding breeches, clean, white, English; the naked girl with that fearful thing in her hands; the bones between them; and last, and possibly the worst, Chris's keen half-smiling face intently watching. "Oh don't, Pam!" she cried, "don't! don't!"

No one, however, took the slightest notice of her. Pam's voice had sunk to a sibilant whisper, but with something of such command in it that Cecil herself felt to be all but falling under its sway. She ceased to speak, and watched. A stillness seemed to settle on them all in that heavy air, and there was no sound of bird or beast about, nothing save only the ceaseless plash slightly to the right of the little stream from the head of the cave above. And then there was a little clatter, and Cecil shuddered. The skull had slipped from the girl's hands and fallen back among the bones.

Pamela stirred now and seated herself more comfortably on the ground. She did not take her eyes from Nanea's face, but she spoke in an ordinary tone to her cousin. "There

you are, Chris," she said. "She is completely under control."

"Test her," said Chris.

"Stand," said Pamela, and Nanea rose instantly, revealing herself as a splendidly made native woman as she stood there upright in full view. "Raise your left arm—your right —straight above your head," said Pamela in Zulu, and the girl obeyed each direction. Christopher understood nothing, and it was plain his ignorance of the commands irritated him. "Tell her to pick up that skull," he said, and Pamela obeyed him. Nanea did as she was bidden, and stood there, not looking at it as before, but holding it carelessly in her hands. "To give it to me," said Chris, and at the white girl's word, she turned and moved across with it to the man, holding it out. He took it, glancing at it curiously. Then, placing it swiftly at his feet, he stood up, fumbled a moment with the lapel of his coat, and made a quick movement towards the fleshy part of the girl's right arm. She did not move. Slowly and deliberately he pressed his fingers on the flesh, and still she did not move. Then he removed them, and Cecil gave a little gasp, for between his fingers was a steel point that gleamed scarlet, and on the dark flesh gathered a globule of blood that trickled down the arm. "So far as I can see, it is perfect, Madame," said Chris carelessly. "But the exhibition, except for the stage and the subject, is not uncommon you know."

"No," said Pamela, "but wait a minute. Nanea! sit down."

The girl sat where she stood, native fashion. "Turn round," said Pamela; and she did so. "Good; now sleep again. Nanea! sleep."

A little silence fell, Pamela staring at the Zulu, Chris watching interestedly. Suddenly, Pamela spoke again, sharply. "Haketsebe!" she called. There was no reply, and silence fell again. Chris moved slightly nearer and trod on a stick which snapped. And then, so unexpectedly that Cecil started, a voice said something. Cecil half glanced

round seeking it elsewhere, but Chris's face changed and he took an eager pace forward. Cecil, then, followed the direction of his eyes, and saw that the voice issued from Nanea's lips. But as she watched her flesh crept. For it was not Nanea's voice that spoke, nor did she understand a syllable of the strange sounds that appeared to come from her lips. The words—if words they were—were rapid, and more like the twittering of birds than human speech, except that clicks sounded in them of which some were not unlike those of the Zulu tongue. The talking went on for some few seconds without the others saying anything, and then Pamela spoke across the stream of it. "Hear that?" she said to Chris, sharply.

"What is she saying?" he demanded.

"I haven't an idea," said Pamela.

"But what language is it?" he asked in a puzzled voice.

"Listen," said his cousin. "Have you no idea? Think of what you've read."

For a few seconds the stream of that ghostly talk was the only sound. Then, suddenly:

"By God!" exclaimed Chris, "Bushman's?"

"I think so," said Pamela intently.

Once again silence, except for that querulous voice from the Past, which riveted their attention. It seemed hours to Cecil, who had leaned on a rock and felt faint with the horror of it. Click, click, tweet, tweet, click—it ran on, an odd voice, high-pitched, feminine; and then a chuckle of laughter. At that the scene swam before Cecil's eyes, but she saw Chris's excited movement. "God!" he exclaimed again, and no wonder, for there was that in the laughter that was sinister, dead, without merriment. But it ceased, and with it, all human sound.

As if far away, Cecil heard Pamela talking, and her cool well-known voice steadied her with every sentence. "That is Haketsebe," said Pamela. "I have heard her more than once, but who she is, I do not know. That is why I call her

Haketsebe.* It is hard to determine, since I cannot understand a word she says, but I believe it is a clear case of multiple personality. Sekeke—her old father—understands what is said, or says he does, but nothing will induce him to translate to me. She speaks fairly frequently when Nanea is asleep, I believe, and often as a result of hypnosis, but not always. The phenomenon either when about to happen or after happening, usually brings Nanea here, though why she does not know. Sekeke brings her here sometimes and induces her to sleep, but not always successfully. But when she comes of her own accord, if he knows of it, he invariably comes too. I take it that to-day he does not know. Judging by the fact she has no blanket, I think she probably slipped out from the hut under the unconscious influence of Haketsebe and came here unseen. That is why I was anxious to hypnotise her, and why I called Haketsebe. We are lucky; it is often months and I get no such chance."

"Make her speak again," said Chris.

"I'll try, but I can't be sure," Pamela replied.

Cecil caught at a knob of rock. "Haketsebe!" called Pamela authoritatively, and repeated the name two or three times, adding in Zulu. "Speak in this language, if you can."

The watchers had almost despaired of more when there came a sound of that laughter again, and as it died away a single sentence. Chris came close up to Pamela. "Tell her," he said, speaking so low that Cecil could hardly hear, "that you do not understand; insist on it; and say that she is to speak in Zulu."

Pamela nodded, and spoke rapidly in Zulu. There was no reply. She spoke again more slowly, and again there was no reply. "It's no good, you see," she said.

As if in reply, there followed almost immediately a little burst of terrible laughter and the voice said, speaking

* *Haketsebe* (Sesuto), a common name for an illegitimate or doubtful child. Lit.: "It is not known."

brokenly in Zulu but so that even Cecil understood the simple words: "You are not my mistress."

Cecil marvelled at Pamela's coolness. Her friend, without a trace of fear or surprise, answered that dead or devilish voice in the simplest possible Zulu again. "No," she said, "I am not. But tell me who you are and why do you come, and if I can help you at all."

"The white queen," said that mocking hideous voice, "has no power over my people now."

"I know," said Pamela. "I want no power. But I would give much to know these things."

"That which drives the buck, the lion, the birds, the winds, the —— (a word which Cecil did not know) drove us, and drives her," said the voice from Nanea.

"And what is that?" asked Pamela.

The voice spoke a word hesitatingly. Chris looked enquiringly at Pamela. She shook her head impatiently and questioned again. "I do not understand that," she said. There was no answer. Pamela made a little gesture of impotence. "She's gone, I think," she said.

"Wait, wait," said Chris imperiously.

And then in the silence began a little sound that swelled louder and louder. Even Pamela whitened beneath her tan. Cecil's knees shook, and Chris put his hand on Pamela's shoulder. It was a little thin sound that seemed to come from far away, a sound of weeping which lasted what seemed a long time, and then, without words, died away.

"Haketsebe!" cried Pamela again, with a new note in her voice. So faint that Cecil could not hear distinctly, there came a reply. Pamela leant eagerly forward over the bones of the dead woman on the grass, listening intently. Now and again, Cecil caught a word of Zulu; now and again heard a click as if of that other speech; and once Pamela interrupted to say in Zulu, "Where? Where? I did not hear." At long last it ceased, but neither Nanea nor Pamela moved. On the latter's face was a strange set expression.

Christopher broke the silence. "What did she say?" he asked.

Pamela made an impatient movement. Then: "Nanea!" she called, and again "Nanea!"

The girl stirred. "Look at me," commanded Pamela, and Cecil observed for the first time that the Zulu had dropped her eyes from Pamela's face, for how long she could not say. Now she raised them, however, soft and limpid, and fixed them on Pamela. Her friend made a few passes, and spoke quickly in Zulu. "Wake," she said at last, "wake. Your sleep is over. You are awake. Nanea!" And she got up.

The native girl sat on for a moment motionless, and then lifted her left hand to the puncture in her right arm which she felt and glanced at. She dropped her hand and got to her feet, and rubbed her eyes. Then she seemed to see Pamela. "Chieftainess!" she said in Zulu, recognising Pamela as if for the first time that morning, and lifted her hand.

Pamela smiled. "Go home," she said. "You should not come here, Nanea. See, here are two tikkies. Go you and get your blanket and sleep at home; you are tired. Go in peace, Nanea."

The Zulu glanced once carelessly at Chris and then turned away. She recognised Cecil, and as she passed her, she smiled. Cecil could not say a word, but watched her as she went on down the rough slope till the bushes hid her. Then she glanced at the others. Chris was holding a match to a cigarette between Pamela's lips. "Give me one, please," she said faintly.

Pamela turned to her. "Sit down, Cecil," she said quickly; "it's all right, dear," and she came quickly towards her. "Chris, get some water, will you?"

Despite the thunder in her ears and the blackness around her, Cecil felt Pamela's arm and leaned eagerly against her. She did not try to speak. Then she felt water lifted to her, and drank eagerly till a hair caught

in her lips. She made a little movement with her hand, saw Chris kneeling before her with his sodden cap dripping in his hands and an anxious look on his face, and could bear up no longer. She hid her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"There, dear, don't," said Pamela. "It's all right now. I'm so sorry we did it. We ought to have thought of you. But it's all right really. There's no harm done. Don't give way so."

"What did that—that—that voice say, Pam?" demanded Cecil looking up, woebegonely.

"I could hardly understand," answered Pamela evasively. "It was nothing, anyway. Don't think of it. Do you feel better now?"

Cecil choked back a lump in her throat, and with a little motion, put back the thick hair from her eyes. "I want to know, Pam," she said. "I must know. We must all know. Pam, please, please, tell me."

"You had better, Pamela," said Chris. "Mrs. Sinclair is all right now. We saw what we saw, we three, and we ought to know."

Pamela withdrew her arm from Cecil and got up, half turning from them and staring out down the gully and over the river to the mountains beyond. "I would rather not say," she said.

Chris held his hand out to Cecil and she took it, lifting herself to her feet. Then he produced his case again, and gave her a cigarette, lighting it carefully. He blew the match out, and looked at it a second to see that it did not glow before throwing it away. Then he turned to his cousin. "Well, Pamela?" he said enquiringly.

Pam shrugged her shoulders. "Really," she said, "it was only a little that I understood, so much of it was either Zulu I did not know, or that other tongue. But she said, I think, that Nanea did not know her, and must not, but that she dwelt in Nanea, and had done so since soon after Nanea's birth. That it was a sorrow for Nanea and that

she should leave, but dared not. If she did, she would be 'driven' by the picture on the walls, which she called by a name I did not catch or could not understand. She said that we, too, could not escape it (whatever it was), and that she spoke now because we three were in the shadow of its hand. We should learn it by—and then again I could not hear, and asked, as I suppose you heard. She named a place, but I could not catch the name. However she described it, 'The place of the Fall and the Pool above the Nek of the Caves.' There would the strong (you I suppose, Chris) be weak, and the weak (you or I, I don't know which, Cecil) be strong. Then there was a good deal more that was quite beyond me, and then one sentence which I do not at all understand. But it was quite clear."

A rock pigeon flew from the cave noisily, and Cecil, her nerves still on edge, gave a little cry and caught the arm of Chris who stood by her. He just glanced at her, and then looked again at Pamela who had not moved. "Yes?" he said, "and that was——?"

"'The voice of the child is not to be silenced,'" she repeated, bluntly.

For a while they all three stood silent and motionless. Then Chris shrugged his shoulders almost imperceptibly. "Come," he said, "let's be going. I am grateful that I came to Africa, Pamela, and to Three Springs. It seems that you live here with the gods."

Pam laughed, and glanced at Cecil's face. "Or devils," she said, "eh, Cecil?"

She had scarcely spoken when all three started and looked round. There was a sound of a low roll of thunder on the air and they saw that a black cloud had come up behind the hill while they had been talking. It was plain that a downfall was imminent. "By Jove," said Chris, "we might be in a pantomime! Pamela talks of devils and at once the thunder rolls! But we're in for it. Let's shelter in the cave."

"Oh no," cried Cecil, "not the cave. I've had enough

of that cave. There's shelter near the river, Pam, isn't there? Under those cliffs where we had our dinner that day we first came. Let's go there."

"Quickly then," said Pamela. "It will begin in a minute."

The three of them set out for shelter, sliding, slipping, climbing among the rocks and bushes. The exercise did them all good, and soon even Cecil was laughing. Chris proved a mighty climber. He took risks, jumping from rock to rock, and he had extraordinarily strong arms which reminded Cecil of Pamela's. Once she found herself stranded on a bit of a peak, he below her, and called out that she was stuck. He reached up his arms and told her to slide forward. It seemed perilous, but she obeyed, and just as she felt herself unable to stop, she reached his hands which clasped her waist and swung her, with hardly an effort, to safety beside him. "Good," he said smiling, "you are not afraid." "You are so strong," she said, smiling back; but he made no reply except to hold aside a bush for her to pass.

The rain began half way down, but the big drops were not falling thickly till they reached the river's level. There, however, it began in earnest. "Run!" shouted Pamela, and led the way. Chris waited a second for Cecil to pass him, and then tore after her. The storm broke in a fury. Panting and dishevelled, the girls reached the cliff and hesitated. Chris passed them and made for some bushes which grew at its base. These he pulled towards him, and revealed a little hollow that threaded like a path behind them. First Pamela and then the other two ran up it, and in a few yards found that the cliff hollowed out still more and made a fair shelter. Pamela dropped on her hands and knees and scrambled as far in as possible, and Cecil followed. "There's heaps of room," she panted to Chris.

That was somewhat of an exaggeration, but there was certainly some shelter. The bushes in front all but hid their view, and the rocks curved unpleasantly near their

heads, but bunched up and close together they were more or less dry. Outside the rain now pelted down, and in a little it began to trickle from the cliff and drip on to them. But the shelter served, and, as Chris said, it was too heavy to last.

"I hate a storm like this," said Pamela. "It makes one feel so small. We talk about the mastery of man, but in five minutes the weather can make us run to holes like rats!"

Chris laughed. "If we did not wear clothes, and did not shelter in houses until our bodies were altogether become enervated, it would be different," he said.

"Not altogether," put in Cecil. "Even natives would hide from this."

"Anyway," said Pamela, "Nature is really our mistress."

Cecil laughed. "That's the chief article of her creed," she said to Christopher.

"Is it?" he answered. "Then you must abandon it, fair cousin. Man has fought Nature for centuries and is not far off winning out. Our foes are now of our own household. But for them, we should be masters of the world, and possibly masters of the universe."

"Explain, professor," said Cecil.

"Well," he said, "think of our wealth and our power and our numbers. We have eliminated distance, and every natural obstacle. The world lies at our feet. There is nothing we could not undertake, nothing we could not do. We could produce so fast that a tenth of our time and our labour would supply all our needs. The rest we could give to any enterprise. We should first re-arrange the world; select distributing centres; build air, sea and land routes; plan cities, gardens, sanatoria, workshops, on a reasonable scheme; and then worthily free and endow science. There is but one obstacle—Man himself. He is jealous, petty, covetous, quarrelsome, and, worse still, proud and damnably obstinate. Men have never seriously combined—a few groups, here and there, yes, for selfish

ends, a trade that it may defraud, a nation that it may rule, a trust that a few owners may be multi-millionaires. That is all. But nationality is rubbish, class-war lunacy, and the millionaires are but poor fools. If we worked together, we should all be gods."

"Yes," said Pamela, "jealous gods, petty gods, covetous gods, quarrelsome gods, and worse still proud and damnably obstinate gods! And we should fall from heaven and find ourselves in hell. Also, would there be goddesses?"

Cecil laughed. "Answer," she said, nudging Chris.

"Kamerad," said Chris gravely, attempting to hold up his hands.

The rain spluttered on. Suddenly Chris burst out again. "That's all very well, Pamela," he said, "but it doesn't end the argument. If it does, then let's chuck in our hands and go off somewhere and live like savages. What I mean is just this: we've advanced in commerce, science, education and so on, but we have as yet refused to see that the great theories underlying our civilisation and to a great extent stultifying it, are the theories of savages. I've got this, and it's mine; you've got that, and it's yours—we glare at each other. By force of circumstances, we do deals, swopping goods, and by force of circumstances we've introduced credits and moneys and created vast industries; but the principle is the same old hideous thing that it was in the dawn of history and before. If we pooled, shared, worked for the common end, we should change the whole face of the world. And thank God, that is what men are coming to see. It is the under-dogs who see it first; the top-dogs shut their eyes to it. But the under-dogs are the more numerous, and they must win."

Pamela clasped her hands round her knees. "Go on," she said.

"Well, you give me the key. The women's movement all over the world is nothing more nor less than an indication of this. They've been the under-dogs, the property of men, classed with his horses and houses and sheep and servants

in an obsolete commandment. Men have fought over their heads, and fought for the possession of them. Now they raise a cry. They demand to know by what right? Slowly, very slowly, they've proved that women can do things, and they ask by what authority their sex has been excluded from this and limited to that. There is no answer, except the weak one that it was the old law. At long last that has been laughed out of court, and a new age is emerging, the age in which sex-war or sex-dominance is being replaced by sex-co-operation and equality. What the future may hold for us under the new principle, no man can say, but it is rosy with hope. And why? Because in one direction at any rate, we are going to combine."

Still Pamela refused the challenge, but her silence seemed provocative.

"Oh, I know," burst out Christopher, "that difference of function still continues. The mother is eternal and must be, but even there new principles are coming into light. The family was the basis of half the world's woes. Parents regarded their children as their private property. For the sake of the children, any wrong might be attempted. The man set out to fight that he might make a place, and always a still better place for his children. If he could sell goods at a penny more than his usual profit, he sold them at that—for the sake of his children. For his family, he aimed at a place in the sun—an estate—and that he won at the expense of others. The unity of the family made for the subjection of the wife, for each fighting group required a leader. We must cut, then, at the root of all that. The Christian idea of the family, as the unit, is outworn and must go. Children belong to the race—to the State first, while we have States, but in the end to the race. Mothers are not mothers for their own pleasure or profit, still less for their husband's. All human life is knit in one. We must order things for that end. There will be liberty for friendship, for art, for creative genius, for enjoyment, for sexual pleasure; but the rights of the race will be safe-

guarded. These individual activities must serve and not hinder the race. The rights of the individual will be allowed, on the other hand, so long as that quota of time and service which each owes to the whole is freely given by him."

"'The voice of the child is not to be silenced,'" quoted Pamela, ironically.

Cecil started. She had, for the moment, forgotten. "Oh Pamela," she cried, "why did you remind us of that awful woman?"

Pamela got up. "The rain has stopped," she said. "Let us go. . . . My dear, Chris always talks a queer mixture of sense and nonsense. There is a lot of sense in what he says, and maybe the future will unfold some sort of communism, such as he suggests. I do not know. But I do know that we must grow into it. Pain and travail have lifted us from such conditions as those in which the Bushmen lived, and if we are to be lifted higher still, pain and travail must still do it.

> 'Nothing begins, and nothing ends,
> That is not paid with moan.'

There is no other road. Meantime, I see no diminution in the power of the old laws. When a man says to a woman: 'You are free to do as you please,' he has ceased to be her lover. When a woman says to her child: 'You belong not to me, but to the State,' she ceases to be a mother. It may come. There was perhaps a time when ape-men ceased to be apes and became men; and there may perhaps dawn a day when men shall cease to be men. What they will be, God knows. Nor do I much care. I am a woman. Unless I am much mistaken, so are you. As for Chris here, I will not say. Man or monster, anyway, get up," she added laughing, "and let's be going."

Chris got up. "I am a man," he said. "But I see a new creation."

"Possibly," retorted Pamela quickly, "it remains to be proved that you are fit for it."

They had left their horses at some huts on the Pondoland side, and thither now they went. The saddles had been under shelter and were dry enough, but the road to the crossing of the river was slippery. Also before long, it began again to rain. The Umtamvuna was very full, a roaring muddy stream which frightened the horses though they got safely over at last. The path to the house had been in places all but washed away, and they rode up only by picking their way among the bushes, grass and stones to one side of it. At Three Springs, Cecil went at once to change, and Pamela to find her father. She came in when her friend was practically dressed and was about to put on her hat, but at the sight of it, she shook her head. "You can't go, my dear," she said. "Father says the roads will be awful, and that it is sure to pour again."

"Oh!" cried Cecil, "but I must! Heaven knows what Hugh will say."

"My dear Cecily," said Pamela, "Hugh is not a fool. The chances are they have had a storm up there, for this seems to have come along the range. In any case, he will guess. He knows you are here, and with any luck you will be home to-morrow. Besides you can't go, and you can't send a message anyhow, and there's an end of it. Even if we sent to Harding and wired to Kokstad, he wouldn't get it. So be a philosopher for once, and look forward to a jolly evening. Personally, I'm delighted. Now I'm going to change myself. Chris and Father are in the library; do go and find them. Lunch will be ready shortly."

Cecil went, but in the library Chris was alone, wandering round and looking at books. At the moment he was holding a little volume in his hand, and standing beneath the bronze of the dying Zulu. "Where's Mr. Urfurd?" she asked.

"Gone to make sure the horses are rubbed down, I think," he said. "What a topping library he has got here. I had no idea. Really I think it promises to be a delightful visit! Do you know Arthur Benson's verse? May I read you something quite short? I call this a perfect poem:

"'Twas hid in mist to-day,
The land I love;
Thin veils of vapour lay
Around, above.

Tired head and weary hand,—
Onward I fare;
I can but guess the land
I love lies there."

Cecil drew a deep sigh. "Read it again," she said softly.

He did so, and replaced the volume, she not caring whether or not he saw that her eyes were misty. "Here is another modern poet that I like, too," he said. "Quite different—mostly quaint translations of old French verse. (He turned the pages quickly.) Listen. This is the last verse of 'Baby's Grace.'

"Praise to God who giveth meat
Convenient unto all to eat,
Praise for tea and buttered toast,
Father, Son and Holy Ghost."

Cecil laughed. "How sweet," she said. "It has a sort of grave sound, too, as if it were a serious matter."

"It is," said Chris. "That's the best side of Christianity, which we've nearly forgotten, the Christianity that carved grotesques on misericordes and set grinning gargoyles among carven saints. Oh, but there are some fine books in this library! Here's a delightful sinner," and he took down the Villon Societies' edition of François Villon's poems.

"Read me something," said Cecil. "You spoke of Villon at Durban, and I had no idea whom you meant!"

He glanced at her quizzically. "There's a great deal in him I can't read to you," he said with a smile, "or at least I don't know you well enough yet. Still, listen to this."

He read her the Ballad of Old-time Ladies, with its Envoi:

> "Prince, you may question how they fare
> This week, or liefer this year, I trow:
> Still shall the answer this burden bear,
> But what is become of last year's snow?"

Cecil repeated the last line, and sighed a little, but Chris did not seem to notice. He put the book back, and sauntered on round the well-filled shelves. Here and there he called her attention to something—a history, a volume of essays, a novel—and hit off book after book in a sentence or two. Cecil followed in a sort of dream. It was a new experience to her. "Have you read everything in the world?" she exclaimed at last.

He smiled. "Not by hundreds of miles of shelves," he said. "I never visit a big library without thinking how little I have read. I never think of what I have read without bitter grief at the remembrance of what I have forgotten, and I never remember what I have forgotten without grieving at the inadequacy of what I remember."

"Then why read at all?" said Cecil, laughing merrily at him. "It sounds pretty hopeless."

Chris turned on her, a book in hand, and looked at her steadily for a second or two without replying. She returned his gaze frankly, wondering, as she had done more than once already in the history of their short acquaintance, of what in the world he was thinking at such times. Then he sighed. "You are more right than you know," he said; "I believe it is hopeless. Probably men like myself read too much. Our own thinking is dimmed, effaced, by the thoughts of others. We are shown ten thousand mysteries that cannot be unravelled, and in the end we despair of there having been any revelation. We learn of so many gods that we follow none. We dabble in so many sciences that we forget the science of our own hearts. We read of so many theories and of so many schemes, that we build our own theories on theories and not on facts. We should

be of all men the most miserable if it were not for one thing. We should wander ever deeper into the darkness if it were not for that one thing. And even so, we often miss it."

"I don't understand," said Cecil, softly, but with a woman's intuition not looking at him now.

"Don't you? Well, I expect the book's here. Let me see. . . . Yes, here it is. Listen.

> "An idle poet here and there,
> Looks round him; but, for all the rest,
> The world, unfathomably fair,
> Is duller than a witling's jest.
> Love wakes men, once a lifetime each;
> They lift their heavy lids, and look;
> And, lo, what one sweet page can teach,
> They read with joy, then shut the book.
> And some give thanks, and some blaspheme
> And most forget; but, either way,
> That and the Child's unheeded dream
> Is all the light of all their day."

He shut the book almost reverently, and put it back. Cecil did not move. "Well?" he said lightly.

Cecil turned and walked to the window without a word. But Chris did not follow her. In the silence, they could hear the pattering of the rain outside.

Mr. Urfurd came in. "Hullo! You two here," he said. "Where's Pamela?"

Cecil made a great effort and pulled herself together. She turned to him smiling. "Seen to the horses, Mr. Urfurd?" she said lightly. "Pam's changing, and Mr. Ashurst has been entertaining me by talking books; but really, you know, I cannot imagine *what* Hugh will say."

CHAPTER IV

SOME weeks later, Cecil was sitting sewing on the stoep at Springfontein when Hugh came in, a little early for lunch. He had been riding on the farm, and he stepped across to his wife and kissed her. "Well," she said, "had a good ride?"

"Yes, my darling; you should have been there. It was glorious out—not too hot and a clear view. And whom do you think I met?"

"I don't know," she said, gathering up her work.

"Well, Hardcastle and the Urfurds' cousin, Ashurst. They were going fishing."

Cecil dropped her work carelessly, and stooped to pick it up. "You don't say so," she said, her face hidden. "I had no idea Mr. Ashurst knew the Hardcastles."

"It seems that he had a letter of introduction and arrived last week. I rather liked the look of him and asked him to call soon. You don't mind? I said he might ride over for lunch one day, if he cared to do so. By the way, how goes the time now? My watch has stopped—beastly nuisance."

"I'll go and hurry it up," said Cecil, and left him. She went to the kitchen to tell the servants to bring in luncheon, and then to her room to wash her hands. Thoughts chased each other through her mind, and suddenly she stopped dabbling her hands and stared out of the window. If Christopher Ashurst should speak of that scene in the cave! She had not told Hugh of it, though she hardly knew why. He would be a little annoyed, of course, and his dislike of Pamela would deepen. Besides he was utterly sceptical of that sort of thing and would hate her having been mixed up at all in it. Pamela, she knew, would never speak of it. But would Pamela have warned her cousin?

All through lunch, the thing ran in her mind and soon assumed big proportions. She felt that she must see and warn Chris before he came. And he might come to-morrow. She had a feeling that it was not likely he would wait now. A plan began to form in her head, but she would have to be careful. Hugh must not suspect. He would not understand. He might even be suspicious. She looked across at him. "Hugh," she said, "do you want the car this afternoon?"

"No," he said, "why?"

"Well, I want some more wool for my work. I must have it, and I've put off sending for it for days. If you don't want the car, I thought I might motor into Kokstad and get it. I could take your watch too," she added, with a happy inspiration.

"I fear I can't come," he said.

"Can't you?" she said. "I'm so sorry, but I didn't mean to bother you. You know I can manage the car perfectly well for that short way, and I could take a boy, of course. I'd rather like the run."

"Very well, dear," he said. "Go, if you want to, but do take care. The road's still pretty vile."

She immediately changed the subject, but all the while was asking herself if she dared call on the Hardcastles. She started when Hugh suggested the very thing. "You might call in at the Hardcastles'," he said, "and renew your acquaintance with Ashurst. I expect he'd be delighted to see you."

She did not dare look at him. What did he mean? Did he suspect anything? Of course not; the thing was absurd; besides, what was there to suspect? But she ruled the Hardcastles out instinctively. "Oh, I don't think so," she said. "I hardly know him. If he wants to call, he will, since you've seen him." And then she could have bitten her tongue out for saying so, and added, "Unless I'm delayed. Then, perhaps, I might drop in for tea."

"All right," said Hugh, carelessly. "Just as you like. Don't be late, though, darling. And don't tire yourself."

"Finished?" queried Cecil, getting up. "I'll go and get ready. Would you tell the boys to get the car out."

She went to her room, and he to the yard to see about the car. She frowned at herself as she opened the wardrobe door. What should she wear? As if it mattered!

But it did matter. As the car sped swiftly along, taking most of her attention because of the many bumps in the road, the undercurrents of her thought ran ever more swiftly and clearly. She did want to see Christopher Ashurst. She wanted it with all her heart and soul. The warning was necessary—well, an advantage at any rate—but beneath all that she wanted to see him. She saw his face mentally as clearly as she had seen it on that first meeting. The thought of him stirred her whole body. She hardly dared to ask herself how much she wanted to see him, but the desire lay there, utterly insistent, beyond doubt.

Should she, then, go to the Hardcastles'? Now she said to herself: 'Yes, of course, it's absurd not to'; and now: 'No, it won't do, Hugh might——' Hugh might what? She refused to answer that. Deliberately she avoided the turning to the magistrate's house. Two minutes later she told herself she was mad to do so. And then the fates stepped in.

The car was running quietly down the main street, under the shady trees that do so well in favoured Kokstad because the water supply is unlimited and a little runnel sings all the year along each side of the road. As she neared the hotel, she saw him. Her hands trembled on the steering wheel. There was no doubt about it. He was standing in the entrance with his back to the street talking to a couple of men. Old Mr. Coxon was one; she could see his white beard. Should she stop? No; impossible. She must! But how with the men there? The car was opposite; it was passing. . . .

Chris turned quickly, on an unexplained impulse, for no one had said anything. In an instant his hand flew to his cap and he took a couple of quick steps towards her. There

was no hesitation about him. "Mrs. Sinclair!" he called, and she slowed down. Her blood raced, but he must not see it. If only she did not colour.

"What luck!" he was saying. "I saw your husband this morning, and now you this afternoon. Did he tell you? I'm staying at the Hardcastles', and he asked me to call. I was coming in any case, but I hoped we might meet. The Hardcastles said they knew you very well."

His strong hand closed over hers. It was utter madness, but she hardly dared look at him. "How do you do? How jolly to see you here," she found herself saying stupidly.

"Fancy you motoring alone!" he said quizzingly. "What's the car? A Buick? Where are you off to? Let me drive you; I've nothing to do."

Cecil glanced back momentarily at the men. Old Mr. Coxon was plainly watching. "Oh I'm only going a little way down the street," she said. "I want some wool, and I've brought Hugh's watch to be mended. You're walking?" Then, with what she thought was an idea, "I can drop you at the Hardcastles' on the way back—if you like," she added.

"Thanks ever so much," he said, and instantly put his hand on the catch to open the door. She had not quite meant that, but—— Well it was too late now. The door was open. "Shall I drive you?" he queried, hesitating on the step.

"Oh no," she said, "I'll drive. I've no distance to go. Get in."

The little business of restarting the car restored her confidence. "You'll not be the least use," she said gaily. "You can't possibly match wool!"

"Can't I?" he retorted; "you'll see," and she instantly perceived another mistake. He would enter the shop with her. Everyone would wonder at their being together. Mrs. Furrie would tell every other customer, and it would be half over the town in an hour. She knew these little towns.

Hugh would hear. He—well, it was too late. She slowed down at the door.

"Don't bother to get out," she said hurriedly. "I won't be a minute."

But he was already out and forestalling the boy behind. "Indeed I shall," he said, "and I'm coming in to choose the wool." He read the name. "'Furrie.' Do you come here often?"

"Not very," she said in a panic, "but (truthfully) I do all this sort of shopping here."

"Then I shall haunt the place," he said, smiling down at her.

They bought the wool, and they took the watch. "Now for the Hardcastles'," she said, settling herself in the seat.

He frowned. "I wish the Hardcastles were twenty miles away. Can't you run me a little out this way? I don't know this end of Kokstad."

She laughed. (It would not then be necessary to go back up the main street, she thought quickly.) "Yes, if you like," she said, "though there is nothing much to see. We'll go and have a look at the site for the railway station. In our life-time, we are never likely to see much else here."

"I trust not," he said. "Kokstad is delightful, but there are other places. Don't you wish this was Charing Cross? How would you like a little dinner to-night at a foreign restaurant in Soho, and a theatre afterwards?"

"Oh don't," she exclaimed. "You make my mouth water. You don't know how I long to get away sometimes and see the world a bit. I went from Griqualand to London and I came back without having seen anything worth speaking of, and here I've stuck ever since. And here I shall stick for all my days I think. But tell me of places; I love to hear."

Chris had the gift of vivid language, and, deliberately as he had ever done anything in his life, he laid himself out to use it that day. His companion saw visions and dreamed

dreams. She had almost forgotten the main thing she wanted to say, when the magistrate's house came in sight. Then she spoke hurriedly.

"Oh," she said, "one thing quickly before I forget. When you call, please don't speak of the Sunday morning at Three Springs. Not of Nanea, I mean. Hugh would hate my having been there. He thinks all that sort of thing rubbish."

Chris glanced understandingly at her. "I won't," he said. "It shall be our secret. You can depend on me. And the Hardcastles of course don't know."

Their eyes met again as he promised. It is amazing how little things like that matter in life.

She told Hugh that she had met him, and Chris called next day. She came in from the garden in a simple linen dress and a sun-bonnet to find him sitting with Hugh and having a drink before dinner. He was very much at his ease with him and with everything, and talked easily and lightly on any subject that came up. He drew Hugh out, and when he was gone, Hugh said that he liked him and that they must ask him and the Hardcastles to dinner.

That event came off a week later, and meantime they had met outside of the church on the Sunday. To even the party, they asked Mr. Gressly, the clergyman, and his wife, and a Miss Evans, a school-teacher who was staying with them. Miss Evans was fair and florid, and Cecil was aware that she made a good contrast to herself. (Neither of the two married ladies counted.) So she put on a shimmering tissue of gold, and wore a red rose at her breast. Hugh came in from his dressing-room to have his tie completed satisfactorily, and when she had done, stepped back to admiré her. "My darling," he said, "you look lovely. Oh what a witch you are, Cecily! It is too good to be true that you should be mine."

"Hughlets," she laughed reprovingly, "you talk as if I were a part of your property."

"You're my wife," he said smiling and uncomprehending.

"Isn't that property?" She kissed him, but refused to allow him to touch her. He would spoil her hair, she said.

The Gresslys came first, and Cecil was very gracious to Miss Evans. They were talking together when Hugh heard the Hardcastles' motor and went out to greet them. Cecil did not at once move, but, with her eyes on her guests in the drawing-room, it seemed to her almost as if she could see the half-darkened stoep. There was a sound of conversational greetings, a step or two, and then they came in. She would not look at him as she shook hands with the magistrate and his wife, but when she did she was bold. To her it seemed that he did not attempt to hide his admiration. She led the way gaily to dinner.

They played a rubber or two of bridge afterwards, and then, the game palling on them all, went out to the stoep. The night was utterly still. The stars sparkled above them as they only can over the veld or the desert. Chris put it into words. "It's worth coming to South Africa," he said, "if only to see the stars here."

"So many great worlds," said Mr. Gressly sententiously.

"So all the books say," said Cecil. "It seems to spoil them somehow."

"Do you think so, Mrs. Sinclair? Surely the fact ought only to deepen our reverence for the Creator. I have been told that if you reduced the solar system to about the scale of this garden, the nearest star would be thirty miles or so away. Approximately four light years. Yet the Milky Way is roughly 300,000 light years across. And you can even pierce with a telescope through the vast hosts of the encircling universe to the utter blackness of space beyond."

Cecil sighed half audibly. Chris moved abruptly. Hugh reached for his whisky and soda. Then Cecil rose to her duties as hostess and made a great effort to carry on the conversation. "Really," she said. "But what is a light year, Vicar? I'm afraid I'm very ignorant."

Mr. Gressly cleared his throat, but Chris saved the party another lecture. "Imagine yourself travelling on a sun-

beam, Mrs. Sinclair," he said lightly. "It would be more fun than a Ford. The sun's the terminus and off you go. Eight minutes to the Earth, eight and a half to the Moon, four hours to old Daddy Neptune on the edge of our little lot, four years to the first star, and a couple of hundred thousand to the Milky Way."

Hugh laughed. "Want to start, my darling?" he queried.

"The mind cannot comprehend such distances," said Gressly as heavily as ever. "But it is wonderful that we should be the centre of interest, so to speak, in such a universe."

"Don't you think any other stars are inhabited, Vicar?" asked Miss Evans deferentially.

"I believe the general conclusion of scientific men, Miss Evans," said the clergyman, "is that no other planet could possibly support human life. As the stars are largely in a gaseous state, they are, of course, out of the question."

Chris sat up sharply in his chair, and in a moment the slight incident that alone makes the conversation worth recording came about. Cecil, sitting next him, was suddenly and instinctively conscious that he was about to break out into a vehement argument, and equally instinctively she did not wish him to do so. Under cover of the darkness, she put her hand on his knee for a second. That was all.

When the time came for her guests to go, Hugh went on with a lantern to the cars. Chris was the last to leave. He lingered a second on the stoep. "Thank you for stopping me," he said, his eyes seeking those of his hostess.

"Why?" she said.

"In another minute, I should have plunged into the subject, dogmatised just as much as he did, and generally said too much. I nearly always do. But it's not too much if I just say 'thank you,' is it?"

She made no direct reply. "Come again soon," she said softly.

"May I?" he said, still lingering. "I should love to; and are you likely to be coming to Kokstad?"

"Saturday," she said, as if it were natural for her to do so. "With Hugh. We leave the car at the Royal."

He hesitated a moment, peering at her in the half dark. "I must go," he said, "good-night. But it is very hard; you are looking so absolutely lovely to-night." And he turned and went.

Cecil went indoors feeling that she walked on air, like a girl. There was no room in her mind for another thought. He had admired her; he had said so; he and she had had just a little touch of understanding across the gulf of mere friendship. The world was very good. She was gay with Hugh, quite genuinely and innocently gay. "It went off well," she said.

He made some reply and went to get whisky for a last drink. "Yes," he said, returning, "I think it did. Gressly is a bit of a fool, though. Jove! the way Ashurst rolled out those figures. He livened the old parson up. Can't think how any fellow remembers so much. I never can."

Cecil laughed. "You can't," she said, "you dear old thing, and you had better not try. Good-night. I'm tired. If I'm asleep, don't wake *me*."

When he at last came in, she was not asleep. But she pretended to be. Hugh got into his bed and blew out the candle. He shortly snored. Cecil stared out into the darkness and was very happy.

Christopher called again. They met him (by chance, he said) at the Royal on Saturday. He and Hardcastle departed to Zululand on a visit the next week, and returned together the week after. He called again at once, and at tea, the subject of an expedition to Basutoland was really canvassed. "I intend to go anyway," said Chris to Hugh, "but it would be most awfully jolly if we could make up a party—you and Mrs. Sinclair, Pamela and I—who else?"

"Gwen and Daddy," said Cecil.

"Yes; that's six. Enough, isn't it?"

"Well," said Hugh, "it's enough from this side perhaps, but I suggest that we ride to Qacha's Nek and visit the Mal-

lory's for a night. Mallory is an awfully good sort who was with me in Rhodesia, and he's in the Basutoland Police Service now, Inspector I think. At any rate he knows the Border better than most people, and if we could persuade him and his wife to come along with us, it would be a great score. I've been in Basutoland with an official and without, and there's no doubt as to which is the best way to do it! Of course, if Mallory wishes, he can smooth over everything for us, and in any case, I might ask him for a police-guide and we could get some camp stuff up there. How long could you be away, darling?" he added, turning to Cecil.

"Oh I don't know," exclaimed Cecil, her eyes sparkling, "but let's be away at least a fortnight. Oh, Hugh, it will be perfect! Now don't let us delay a day. Let's write at once to all the people concerned and fix dates."

"My darling, we must take a little while to think about it."

"Hugh, we don't need to take an hour. Do we, Mr. Ashurst? Now let's think. I propose that we send the horses and so on, to Matatiele, and we motor from here and pick them up the day before we wish to start. We'll allow a fortnight for the coast people to get their stuff up, oh and we'd leave Matatiele on a Saturday and spend the week-end at the Nek. We can camp out there. Very well then, to-day is Wednesday; Saturday fortnight we leave for Matatiele." She got up and ran across to Hugh. "Say 'Yes,'" she cried. "Not another word—just 'yes.' No, nothing else. Hugh, I won't let you speak. Just say 'Yes.'"

"Yes," said Hugh.

"Hurrah!" shouted Cecil. "Good-bye, Mr. Ashurst—I'm off to write to Gwen. I shall invite them here for a day or two before the Saturday, Hugh." And she disappeared.

Hugh sighed, and looked comically at Chris. "Have some more tea?" he said, and then, pouring out a cup: "It's all very well, but you can't start an excursion of this sort at a

moment's notice. We've got to think about the packs first, and have them all overhauled. And the horses. There must be at least six pack-horses for the six of us, though of course we can get most of the food up there from the natives, or at any rate, if Mallory comes we can. Well, each farm of the three can find a couple I suppose. As a matter of fact, I should think each better run his own outfit as far as tents and blankets and so on are concerned. Eldred has everything I know, but I doubt Urfurd. Still I've a couple of tents. I don't know whether Three Springs has much in the way of pack-horses though."

"Leave that to me," said Chris. "Between us, we'll raise four down there, and bring our four selves. If we're short, Hardcastle would lend me a pack or even two. He has some new Coryndons. That all seems to me plain sailing. But what's the route at the top?"

Hugh, who loved this sort of thing, considered. "Well," he said, "we might make either for the Malutsinyane Falls or for Mont aux Sources. The first means a ride across the country; the second up the Border."

"Which is better?" queried Chris.

"Oh it's a toss up. Still I think the Border wins. We should have to cross some pretty bleak country, but the views over Natal are magnificent. Only Mont aux Sources itself is much too far for the ladies."

Cecil, bursting in, her letter in her land, caught the last words.

"Rubbish, Hugh," she said. "It must be Mont aux Sources; I'm dying to get there, and of course we can do it."

"My darling," he protested, "you haven't an idea of the distance. Look here, Qacha's Nek to Ramatseliso's, one day; to Sehlabathebe's (that's the last store) another day. We might camp at the Police Camp there. Well, then it would be two nights out at least, if ladies are with us, before we can get to Mokhotlong Camp. Hardly any women have been there. There's no road you know, in the proper

sense of the word, only tiny paths, very rough and often very steep. We should have to rest there the rest of the week at least. Then, going on, we might make the head of the Sinku in a day, but I doubt it;—no, we must take the other road, by the Khubelu, it's better. Camp one night on the river, and the next at the top, right up on the Border, near Giant's Castle. The next night we could be at the Eagle's Nest."

"What's that?" demanded Cecil eagerly.

"A little cave right up on Mont aux Sources, facing the Buttress. If it's clear, the view from the top is superb. But that's ten hard days from the Nek—my darling, it's absurd. You've got to get back!"

"Oh Hugh, it isn't. Mr. Ashurst, do say we can do it!"

Christopher smiled ruefully. "I fear," he said, "that I must really agree with Mr. Sinclair, unless—couldn't we send the ladies home by train from there?"

Sinclair laughed. "A day down to Witze's Hoek," he said. "Possibly they could get a car to the railway from there, but I don't know."

"Well, there you are!" cried Cecil triumphantly.

Hugh sucked at his pipe. "Look here," he said, "I've really got a better idea than that. Honestly, darling, that is a little too much. You'd be fagged out, and wouldn't half enjoy it. But if we were to trek from the Nek to Ramatseliso's, then to Moshebi's, and then to the Tselike almost on the Border, that would be but three nice days. Then set up a week's camp on the Tselike. From there we could make excursions over the Border to Bushman's Nek and see the Bushman Caves, and the other way, into Basutoland. There's fishing, usually decent bird shooting on the marshes, and I know a good place for a camp. By the Falls of the Tselike. There's a great pool there into which the river falls."

He was so occupied with his own plans that he did not notice the silence that had suddenly fallen on the others. The colour faded from Cecil's face. Chris was staring at

the speaker. Even he was startled. "The Pool, and the Falls above the Nek of the Caves," he muttered. "My God!"

"What's that?" said Hugh. "Yes, a rattling deep pool, with an open bit of flat ground below it that's just the place for a camp. Really, you know, I don't think we could do better than that."

"No, no," cried Cecil hysterically. "Not there, Hugh. I want to go to Mont aux Sources. I don't care a bit about the other."

Hugh looked a little annoyed. "Don't be absurd, Cecil," he said, really sharply for him. "I'm certain the other's too far, and we couldn't beat this. If you can't see sense, I shall call the whole thing off. You don't in the least know what trekking up there is like. Possibly Mr. Ashurst here could go on, if Mallory took the opportunity to do a Border patrol in company, but I should not allow you to go. The Tselike will give us just what we want."

Cecil sat curled up in her big chair the picture of misery. She had hard work not to cry. "Perhaps we'd better not go," she said tearfully.

Chris glanced from one to the other. It was plain to him that he ought to go, but how could he leave her without a word? So he pretended not to notice this sudden clouding of the plans, and schemed at a venture for a minute with her alone.

"Have you a map, Sinclair?" he asked. "I'd love to see the route."

Hugh got up. "Yes," he said, "in my office. I'll get it. Don't you come; the place is in a confounded muddle." And he stepped out on to the stoep and crossed the yard in the sun to his rondhavel some hundred yards away.

Cecil was up in an instant. "We can't go," she cried to Christopher. "Oh we can't, we can't! I feel as if some horror were waiting for us there."

Chris stood up too and spoke rapidly. "See," he said, "I must speak to you about it. Tell me how. Couldn't I meet

you somewhere? Motor into Kokstad to-morrow—can't you?"

"Oh I don't know," said Cecil, on the verge of tears. "Anyone might see us."

Christopher caught her hand and held it firmly in his own. She did not attempt to stop him, but even in her misery, her heart beat hard. "We must risk something," he said. "Shall I come here? I can make an excuse."

"Well,—to-morrow—say at three. Ride up over the veld. You know the little gate at the edge of the acacia spinney—the gate that looks towards the Malutis? I'll be there, if I can. Let go; Hugh's coming."

Chris pressed her hand and dropped it. "Don't fear, little woman," he said. "It will be all right. I'll be there."

There was no time for more. He pulled his cigarette case out quickly, selected a cigarette and handed it rapidly to her. When Hugh came in, they were standing naturally and he was holding a match to it.

"Now I can show you," said Hugh, his usual good humour restored again. "This is the Government survey, an excellent piece of work." And he began to unfold it. Cecil slipped quietly out.

Outside the room she hesitated. Then, her mind made up, she reached her sunbonnet down from the hook on which it hung in the hall, and ran out quickly to the garden. There, among the flowers and trees, in the bright fresh sun, she drew in deep breaths of the good air. Hardly knowing what she did, she wandered on, through the rose garden, out by the little path that skirts the wattles, and down to the very gate of which she had spoken to Christopher. It was perhaps a quarter of a mile from the house and completely hidden from it. The spinney of acacias grew thickly there and made a barrier through which it was not easy to pass except by this little path. It ended in a gate, and from the gate the farm veld stretched down to a dam and a little stream and rose again to a new plantation half a mile away. Far off, on the sky line, ran the great range of the Drakens-

berg, and although she did not realise it, she could actually see Ramatseliso's Pass from there. Sometimes the mountains seemed very near; to-day they looked far and were veiled in a heat-mist. She leaned on the gate and gazed at them. She was very still. Little birds moved in the trees behind her, and a male ring-dove broke out into his wooing cry just above her head.

She was much calmer now, but her eyes were big and troubled. A thousand thoughts stirred in her and she could get no order into them. Chris stood out most prominently, the Chris she was to meet here to-morrow, the Chris who seemed to have broken a barrier down at last when he had seized her hand. But she did not argue from that. She refused to consider what might follow. That she loved him, she did not now attempt to hide from herself, nor yet that she loved him as she had not known before what it was to love. It did not seem to her to matter what Chris did or said. Quite possibly he did not love her; she could not in the least believe that he loved her as she loved him. It seemed to her that he could not—that no one could ever have loved as she loved. And she could not argue with her love. It was too immense, too overmastering. She stroked the hard rough wood of the gate like a dumb creature, glad that it was so real and commonplace. Yet even that bar of wood was no longer commonplace. She stooped her lips and actually kissed it.

The road to Kokstad does not pass within sight of that gate. A rise in the ground hides it, and Christopher, riding along thoughtfully, was not aware exactly of its position. On the edge of the farm, he did indeed rein up a minute and glance around. He reckoned that his way to-morrow must branch off here across the veld. He began to consider the situation. If he met the husband as he came to the rendezvous, what should he say? Oh, well, he must talk to Hardcastle to-night about the pack-saddles, and that would be an excuse. But when he came to Cecil, what should he say?

He turned the whole thing over and over in his mind. To him, one thing seemed abundantly clear. If Nanea's words—or Haketsebe's, whoever she might be—meant anything, they meant that Fate lay ahead of them all. One cannot fight against Fate. Chris was conscious that he did not even want to do so. He was definitely elated by the whole turn of events. It had been a chance, his coming to Africa, and now, in a few weeks, all this had developed. It seemed to him incredible that he had not even known that Cecil existed. Cecil. Her image filled his thoughts. Did she care? That alone mattered. But did he dare put it to the test? And if so . . . ?

A hundred miles away and more, Pamela was sitting in the lounge reading. She was curled up in a big chair full of cushions, a reading stand beside her holding a big book on the Native Races of South Africa, it's little reading table carrying a silver box of cigarettes and a small hand bell. Suddenly she pushed the arm holding the book away from her, and stared out disinterestedly at the room. Then she had an idea, and her face lit up. "How stupid of me," she said. She reached out and rang the bell.

In a minute or so, the door opened and Auntie Tot came in. Her little beady eyes sparkled as she saw her mistress. "Missus ring?" she said questioningly.

Pamela transferred her gaze to the old servant, and she studied her quietly for a minute without speaking. Then: "Come here, Auntie Tot," she said; "I want to talk to you."

The old woman came towards her. "Sit there," said Pamela, pointing to the heavy kaross at her feet. The woman squatted down native fashion, watching her. Again Pamela was silent for a while. She knew it does not do to ask a native the question direct. Then she said: "Auntie Tot, tell me about yourself."

The native woman grinned. "Missus knows," she said.

"Missus knows I've lived most all my life with baas Urfurd."

"Yes, yes," said Pamela impatiently, "but you were not born here. What do you remember first?"

"Ow, missus," replied the old creature before her comically, "that very very long time ago. Auntie Tot wants to forget it. She had bad time then."

"Well, but tell me. Didn't you come from Basutoland?"

"Eh, missus, up behind Matatiele, no, farther, up behind Underberg. My people lived on the Malutis up there. But I remember most nothing about it. I guess I just woke up one night, and that very night I say 'Good-bye' to Malutis. I never been there again."

"When the Griquas captured you?" queried Pamela.

"Yes, missus. I was asleep with my people in a very small place, very dark, not at all nice, missus, just a hole in the earth, I think. Suddenly bang! bang!—gun go off. My father—I think he was my father—rush outside. Bang! bang! again. My mother, she clutch hold of me, all shaking. Then come lights, and men dressed in clothes, not like my people at all. They pull me out and mother with me, holding me all the while. Then suddenly she scream and leave go. They push a knife into her, I think; in the morning I was all bloody. One man, he pick me up by the arm and I try to bite him. He smack me on head, and that all I know."

"Yes," said Pamela, "and then?"

"I go to that man's place, and I play there and forget my people. I grow a big girl, and then I have to work. Little to eat, little to wear, much hard work—that place no good, missus. Last, one day, I drop pot full of water, and my master he very angry. He beat me something awful. (The old woman shuddered, but rather comically, so that Pamela could not help laughing inwardly. But she knew at this point in the story, it did not do to laugh.) He tie me to

waggon-wheel, and cut me to bits with his sjambok. Missus knows."

"Show me again," said Pamela.

The old woman unfastened a button of her loose cotton dress and slipped it from her shoulders, half turning round as she did so. Her bare back still carried the weals of a cruel flogging, and Pamela contemplated them in silence. "How old were you then?" she asked at last.

Auntie Tot shrugged her wrinkled shoulders and pulled the dress on again. "How I know, missus?" she said. "Big girl though—breasts quite big then."

"Well?" said Pamela.

"That night I run away—days and days I run. I nearly die. Sometimes I steal mealies, and once I meet Basuto on the road who feed me for a week. But I not like their looks. I run away again, and I think I die. Baas Urfurd he find me in the forest. He take me up. He have waggons then and trek, and I stay with him. Then we come here. And I live here ever after."

Pamela pondered. She knew the latter part of the tale well enough—how her father had built the house and gone away, and after some years had come back with her, a little thing, not much more than a baby. Tot had mothered her ever since, and become 'Auntie.' Of her mother, she knew nothing, or practically nothing. Her father would not speak of her. There was some tragedy, she knew, but what she could not guess, except that her mother had died in child-birth.

She roused herself. "Now, Auntie," she said. "I want you to think hard." She paused. It would not do to suggest too much. "What was your father like?"

"Him little man, naked, I think. *Which* man, my father, I don't know, but I saw many dead men that time, all little, all naked."

"A Bushman, do you think?"

"P'rhaps," said Auntie Tot half-heartedly. She was not over proud of her relations.

"But you're not—or not altogether," said Pamela, half to herself. "Well, anyway, do you remember living in a cave at all?"

The old woman shook her head.

"Nothing about the country up there on the Malutis?"

She shook her head again. Then she appeared about to speak, and thought better of it.

"Tell me," said Pamela, authoritatively.

"Nothing, missus," said Auntie Tot.

"Tot," said Pamela sternly, "tell me. You must. Do you want me to be angry?"

The old woman loved Pamela, but she feared her. The girl could be furious, savage, as she well knew. She made a gesture hopelessly, and then spoke.

"Missus not be angry," she said. "All I remember is foolish words of the people at that damn Griqua's place."

"Ah!" exclaimed Pamela, eagerly, "go on."

"It one time when we go far to cut rushes in the river. Umzimkulu, they call him. Well, one man he say ghosts up there, up the valley in the mountains, missus understand. He say, little ghosts, that eat men's livers when they sleep. 'Nother ghost like man but with dog's head; he dig up graves and eat dead corpses. He live high up, near big pool, where river falls from great cliff. Bad place that. Then we cut more mealies. Bad place that, missus."

Pamela smiled. "Thank you, Auntie Tot," she said. "That's all. You can go now." And she leant back wearily.

CHAPTER V

CHRISTOPHER was sitting writing—or trying to write —in the Hardcastles' drawing-room next morning when he received his first letter from Cecil. It had been written as a result of her meditations the evening before at the little gate hastily chosen as a rendezvous, and was rather a pathetic example of her simple-mindedness in those days. The girl was as it were trying to beat off the relentless march of her fate with the blows of her little hands. She would have put up a better fight in the end if she had allowed it to come on, and had reserved all her powers for the day of shock. She would have done better to have met Christopher as arranged, but now he unfolded the scrap of paper a native messenger had brought and read the lines which she had hastily scrawled.

"Don't come this afternoon (it ran). I daren't face it. Trek probably off. Forgive me.—C. S."

"P. S.—Please burn this at once."

Chris read it half a dozen times, striving to get at all it did not say. Holding the note, he sat back in his chair and thought hard for a while. Then he went out, told the boy there was no answer, and sent him away. That done, he came back, wrote at length to Pamela detailing the suggested plans, and fired off a letter to Jimmy Eldred also, with a post-script for Gwen calculated to engage that young lady eagerly in the proposed adventure. These letters caught the morning's post. At lunch he renewed talk about pack-saddles, and in the afternoon went off with the magistrate to the Government stores to see what could be borrowed. By the evening the trek was practically settled and arranged

so far as Chris was concerned. He had even wired to Durban for photographic plates and more ammunition.

Meantime, up at Springfontein, things did not go easily. Cecil had suddenly thrown her weight against the plan, and Hugh, who could of course see no reason for this change of front, was not unjustly annoyed. The evening before, and Chris gone, he had soon worked himself into a mood in which difficulties and possible dangers to the women bulked large in his eyes, but now, not unnaturally, the male in him was stirred on the other side. It was all: "But why, my darling?" or: "Ashurst has probably made most of his arrangements"; and Cecil could hardly say, what she believed, that Chris would have made none since she had written to him. Husband and wife came nearly to an open quarrel, and it was only that Hugh saw how upset Cecil plainly though inexplicably was, which prevented it. They therefore decided nothing, which was precisely what the astute Christopher imagined they would do. His arrangements made, he did not intend to lose a moment, and in the early afternoon of the day after the abandoned meeting, he rode up to the farm to see how things were progressing.

It was a hot sultry day. Hugh had set off in the car for Matatiele on farm business, and Cecil, with a headache, had gone to lie down in her bedroom after lunch. She had taken off her outer clothes and slipped on a loose wrap, but she could not sleep. At last she rose restlessly, and found a book, which she took to the stoep, just outside the drawing-room window, to read. The stoep was screened by the Japanese honeysuckle, and she made herself comfortable in a Bombay chair. Visitors are rare at an out of the way farm in East Griqualand, and Cecil did not fear interruption. She tried to read, but could not, and she had lost herself in a day-dream when the interview which she had avoided the day before was thrust at her weakest upon her. Chris, enquiring at the back of the farm boys, learned that the baas had gone out in the car and that the missus was lying down. He told Blandina, who appeared, not to waken

her mistress, and said that he would go to the drawing-room and wait for tea. Cecil, then, was hardly settled when she heard a step in the room behind her. She jumped up with a little exclamation and her book slipped to the ground. Facing hastily round, she saw Chris advancing towards her.

He on his part was as surprised as she, but what he saw simply swept him off his feet. There, framed in the doorway of the stoep against the light, was the girl he loved, gloriously flushed, her thick black hair in beautiful disarray, her dress a light silk wrap whose wide sleeves fell back to reveal her bare arms and through which the flesh of her shoulders and neck seemed to glow. Scarcely knowing what he did, he held out his hands and took an eager step towards her, his lips crying her name. And she, suddenly aware of the burden of the last four-and-twenty hours and of all the pent-up passion of the weeks past, surrendered to him as instinctively. She was gathered in his arms, and he was pressing passionate kisses on her face and hair, as quickly as the moon can sometimes leap from the heart of a black cloud and flood the world with light.

Then, indeed, neither knew how long they stood so. Realisation came first to Cecil. She struggled in his arms and escaped, catching her wrap to her breast and panting with emotion. "Oh Chris, Chris, what have we done!" she cried, and burst into tears.

Her weeping recovered the man to his senses. He advanced to her now deliberately, putting his arm about her neck, pulling her head down on his shoulder, and clasping her round her slight childish waist that felt so soft to his touch beneath her thin covering. "My dear, dear Cecily," he whispered. "What have we done? Why, fulfilled our fate, that's all. Since the moment I saw you on the stoep of the Royal I have known that we were made for each other. At first I hardly knew what drew me to you, except just that I was drawn. And you love me, darling, darling Cecily, don't you? Oh I know you do, my love, my queen.

Cecily, if life held no more for me than this, it would be enough. I have longed to stroke your hair, your lovely hair, darling, and longed to hold you in my arms like this. Cecily, I can't hide anything from you. I want you body and soul. I'm on fire for you, my love. Oh Cecily, you won't understand perhaps, but I've lived only for this. I've sought this blindly all my days. It seems to me now that for this, for you, I've been restless, a wanderer; now, *now,* thank God, I have found you at last."

Cecil heard his broken torrential words with a kind of numbed amazement. She made no further attempt to stop his caresses. She lifted her face to look in his eyes but once, and then surrendered with a little sigh. She did not speak. Truth to tell, she could not, for emotion flooded her. She had no fear, and no shame at all. She was utterly content, and she knew that she had never been content before. For a quarter of an hour, perhaps, she literally did not think of the reality of life at all.

But it came, the terrible awakening. The colour suddenly paled from her face, and she pushed him firmly from her, not however relinquishing his hand. She looked round for a chair and pulled it towards her, sinking into it. Chris sat himself at her feet, studied her face for a moment, and then hid his own in the folds of the wrap on her knees.

She caressed his hair for a moment without speaking, and at last, when she broke the silence which had fallen upon them, there was a deep note in her voice which had never been there before. It stirred the depths of his heart. The man in him knew well enough that it was no longer Cecil the girl, but the woman of the centuries who spoke. Yet even Chris could not know what fifteen short minutes had done for her.

"Oh Chris," she said, "why did you not come before? Why did nothing tell me you were on the road? What have I done that I should be trapped like this? Dear, I never knew. . . . You must believe me when I say that. I was so young and no one told me. I was so blind that

I never even saw all that I might have seen. But, my darling, it was not my fault. Nor was it yours of course. Whose was it then, I wonder, or does the world move utterly by chance? But oh, oh Chris, Chris, if you had only come before!"

Chris lifted his head. "What does it matter?" he demanded fiercely. "You love me. You don't love Hugh at all, you know you don't. You can't go on living with him, giving yourself to him. Cecil, it horrifies me to think of it. You're mine, not his. Tell me, tell me honestly at once, you don't love him, do you?"

Their positions had suddenly reversed. It was she who was cool, she who was now even tragically calm, and he who was hurried and overwhelmed. Her hand continued to stroke his head, and when she spoke it was with serene deliberation. "No, Chris," she said, "I do not love Hugh at all as I love you. The things are as different from each other as the light of the sun is different from the light of the stars. But Hugh loves me, and I am his wife."

"What does that matter?" burst out the man impetuously. "What is their absurd man-made marriage law that it should separate us? You say yourself that you did not know what you were doing. A fig for their commandments and their ridiculous morality! If you feel a tenth of what I feel, Cecil, that will not weigh with you for a moment. This is reality; the other was a mocking sham. If there is a God at all, I will look Him straight in the face with you in my arms, and dare Him to do His worst! You are mine, mine! And I am yours. My heart tells me so, and so does yours, does it not? Oh say it does, my love, my dear!"

She smiled down on him. "Chris, I love to hear you talk like that," she said, "I love it though you know not what you say. I love it, though I believe you have often made love to other women perhaps not so unlike that!"

Chris dropped his eyes at her words. His hand sought the edge of her wrap and twisted it hotly in his fingers. But he did not hesitate.

"Cecil," he said, "I won't attempt to hide anything from you. I have thought that I loved other women. There seem to have been many in my life, I don't know why. I can't say that I come to you as perhaps I ought to have come. I've even lived with other women, not for a night or two like most men, but for weeks on end. There was a girl in France, and a girl even when I was a boy at Oxford, silly as it all seems now. I've always been hot-blooded and impetuous. But every one of those loves has ended, burnt out, and left me unsatisfied. Oh Cecily—can you believe me? —this is so different. Even though I'm so hot-blooded, I've been very cool and—and—well, *calculating* with those others. I don't know how to express it, but I have deliberately dealt with them. It was as if the real me was never stirred the whole time, though I confess that I have thought that it was. But it is utterly different with you. I can't prove it; I can only ask you to believe it without proof, because, perhaps your heart tells you to believe; but it is so." And he raised his eyes, caught her hand, and kissed it quietly now, playing with her fingers like a man who discovers a new, intricate and wonderful thing. "It is so, Cecily," he repeated.

Cecil sighed. "It's utterly foolish, dear," she said, "but I believe you. Or I think I do. God knows why. Perhaps because all this is so different from what I experienced when Hugh made love to me. Oh my dear, you cannot know how different! And how different am I! Perhaps, if you had told me such things then—— But I don't know; it is you that makes it different, I think. But put that on one side. We have got to deal with facts as they are. I'm a married woman, Chris, and it is wicked of me even to allow you to do this."

"You shan't say that," he burst out. "I refuse to hear it, or to allow you to say it. We never planned our meeting. I've never flirted with you, Cecily, and that (and there was a touch of humour in his voice) is really very wonderful, my dear. Till this moment I swear I did not dream that

you could love me as I love you. It was too great to be believed. This very afternoon—did you know that I was coming? Did you plan to sit here waiting for me? You know you didn't! Why, you wretch, you even planned not to meet me! It is just fate. You and I were made for this and for one another."

"Did I not plan?" queried Cecil slowly and wonderingly. "My dear, it seems to me now almost as if I did know you would come, and did prepare to meet you. It is as if there had been something deep down in me that moved me to these things without my own self, on the surface, knowing why."

"Well," he exclaimed triumphantly, "what more do you want? You talked of sin just now, but I tell you, Cecily, that if there is sin in the question at all, it will lie in your going back now to Hugh, if you do go. You have moved in a dream till now, and what you did in your dream was not done by the real you at all. Now you are awake, and now you must choose. You walk now in the light, and you can sin now, Cecily, because you see it."

Cecil withdrew her hand from his and leant back in her chair. Her eyes fell on the clock and she read the time, and gave a start. "Chris!" she exclaimed, "I must go. Hugh might come back any minute. Do you know you have been here over an hour? Let me get up." And she started to her feet.

Chris got up too. At the sight of her standing there before him, passion mastered him once more. He folded her in his arms and they kissed again and again as they had kissed before. But now he pressed her to him until she had hard work to suppress a cry. Yet she bent her head before his kisses; dear God, she told herself in her ecstasy, it mattered nothing if he should kill her.

The tempest a little spent, she looked up, murmuring to him: "Oh Chris, Chris, my darling, my love! How I love you, Chris. I had no idea love was like this. It pains, Chris, so that I can hardly speak. I can bear no more now.

Let me go and dress, my dearest, and then, if there is time, I will come and we can talk some more."

He kissed her quietly at that, and released her. She moved to the door, folding the wrap about her body. When she reached it, she hesitated a moment and held out her hand. He leaped across and seized it, kissing it again and again. Then she pulled it from his grasp and disappeared.

Chris walked over to the open window in a kind of dream. He lifted a book from the table by the window, and read the title, hardly knowing what he did. In a bewildered astonishment he noticed how his hand shook. He had no plans to formulate, and indeed he found he could hardly think coherently at all. His whole being whispered the girl's name to him and he was content for the moment with that. He saw the beauty of the garden, of the woods, and of the distant mountains, wholly automatically, for in reality he saw nothing else but her. Her complete and instant surrender lingered in his memory like an enchanting caress. Truly, he did not lie when he said that in all his life he had known nothing like this.

Then the door opened again and she came in. He turned eagerly towards her, but she, radiant and smiling, stopped him with a gesture. "No, my dear," she said, "you don't. We have to talk at once about this Basutoland business for one thing, and for another I've ordered tea. Also I don't want Hugh to find me with my hair tumbling down and my face like a geranium! Sit over there, and give me a cigarette. Light it for me, please."

He did so, lighting it for her at his own lips first. She took it with a look at him which made it hard work to sit still. "Always like that," she said in a low tone, "when you can. But oh, Chris, I believe you have had a horrible lot of practice!"

"Always," he repeated, "then very soon, Cecily, it shall be always. Very soon, dearest. What is there to wait for?"

She laughed. Her short absence had given her back high spirits and command of herself. "There's a lot to wait for,"

she said. "For one thing, you must prove yourself. On your own confession you've been a pretty rascal, Chris, and I expect, if I knew the truth, I should be appalled. Yes, even I, wise as I seem to have grown lately. Oh dear, what a baby I was when I married! But look here; let's change the subject while we can; what about Qacha's Nek and this Tselike business?"

"What about it?" demanded Chris. "It's settled, isn't it?"

"You know it's not settled," she said. "Hugh and I are quarrelling over it, but as I always get my way, we shan't go."

"But I've made all my arrangements, and written to Pamela and Eldred too," objected Chris.

Cecil regarded him severely. "In a word, you've lost no time since you got my note," she said.

"You've grown wonderfully cute as well as wise, lately," laughed Chris.

Her expression changed. "Perhaps," she said, flicking an ash off her cigarette. "But, oh Chris, how can we go to the Tselike after what that awful Haketsebe said? It was a warning. It would be madness to go."

Chris smoked meditatively. "I don't look at it like that at all," he said. "I'm not sure, for one thing, that it was a warning. It may be only a curious coincidence."

"You don't think so," said Cecil decisively.

He hesitated. "Well, to be honest," he said at last, "I don't. I think it is one of those curious things that will not fit in with reasonable views of life. But there are many such. Truthfully, I think it is all part and parcel of our own wonderful discovery. I doubt there is any chance at all in the world, Cecily. I confess I don't understand things, but it seems to me that we've both been led right up to to-day almost as if we had had no will at all. That voice of Haketsebe's is part of the whole. We *must* go, I think."

"Surely not, if we set our faces against it," objected Cecil, unhappily.

Chris leant forward eagerly. "Come away with me instead," he whispered.

Before Cecil could reply, tea came in. They talked of nothing in particular for a few minutes while the girl set the table and handed the cups, but when she had gone, Chris repeated the invitation.

Cecil decisively shook her head. "If we could have gone instantly a quarter of an hour ago," she said, "I think I should have done. But not now—not yet at any rate."

"You can say 'not yet'?" questioned Chris eagerly.

Cecil leant back in her chair and looked out into the bright sunshine. "Yes, dear," she said, "I think I say that. . . . But I don't know what it means. Years and years perhaps. Perhaps one day—but then I shall be an old woman and you won't want me any more."

An impetuous denial burst from Chris, but she stopped him. "Wait a minute," she said musingly. "Perhaps you are right; perhaps we are meant to go on this trek; perhaps by the Falls and the Pool things like that will be made clear."

"That's it," asserted Chris. "That's what I think."

Cecil gave a little shudder. "I dread it somehow," she said.

"Dread it!" echoed Chris. "Oh my dear, I can hardly wait for it! Whatever may come, I long for it. At any rate we shall be together. Think how heavenly it will be to see each other every day, to ride together, to talk together, for a fortnight or three weeks, Cecily. Oh it will be divine! Surely you want it too?"

"Yes," she said dreamily, "I do, but shall we see so much of each other? You forget Hugh, Chris."

"I don't," he exclaimed. "Oh no, little Cecily, I don't forget him, but there will be a lot of us there. I may not have you altogether, but at least neither will he. It will be a sort of fight, a wrestle for you. And I shall win, I know I shall!"

"Hardly a fair fight, Chris," said Cecil.

"No," he burst out, "it isn't a fair fight. That's what's

so damned hard. He starts in possession. He can see you, talk to you, kiss you, and it will be merely what is expected. I must wait for chances like a dog waiting for bones. I hate Hugh, I think, Cecily."

"You mustn't say that," she said. "I don't. I can't somehow. Perhaps it's because he loves me so. I know he does."

"Of course he does," broke in Chris. "He couldn't help himself. All men who meet you love you, I know."

"Don't be absurd," she said smiling.

"It isn't absurd," he retorted. "In Kokstad it's all 'the beautiful Mrs. Sinclair.' Old Hardcastle daren't mention your name for fear of his wife, but I know what even he thinks. Probably the parson is the only one who is not in love with you, and I doubt even him. He's a fool, but he's not blind!"

"What fun," laughed Cecil. "I shall certainly flirt with him if I get the chance now!"

Chris put down his cup and crossed to her. "You're not to say that," he said. "Kiss me, and tell me you don't mean it."

She turned her head away, rippling with laughter. "Go away, Chris—you must. Go away, do you hear? Someone will come. . . . Well, just one then. . . . Oh, that's half a dozen! And besides who are you to command me? I do as I like."

He subsided into his chair. "Oh I know, Cecily, you do," he said. "You always will. You make my strength like water,—I can't even pretend you don't. But pity me, my darling, please pity me. I've hardly realised you yet, and it's so awful to have you and yet not to have you. It's *awful,* Cecily. I doubt I can stand it."

She was out of her chair and by his side in a moment, kneeling by him, murmuring over him, kissing him. "My poor boy," she whispered, "my man. . . ."

He straightened himself. "What an Eve you are, darling," he said wonderingly. "I shall call you 'Eve.' It

seems to fit you, and I'd rather call you by a name no one else uses."

Cecil got up slowly. "Why am I like Eve?" she demanded. "It's strange your saying that."

"Why are you like Eve?" he said meditatively, looking up at her, "why, I wonder. Partly, I think, because you're so delectable. You're made for men for some reason, I think. I know perfectly well all men would say that. You're weak, in a way, which appeals to a man, and yet there is something strong in you which appeals just as much too. You make me want to do things, to make a place for you, to win the world for you. I want to glory in you, and to let everyone know that you love me. And yet I want to rest in you, and for that you are so perfectly made. I could lie at your feet all day, little Eve, and just look at you. I've never felt like that with a woman before."

He ceased. Cecil played with a teaspoon and said nothing.

"And more than that," he went on, rousing himself, "I know that for your sake I would do anything. You are more to me than Paradise. I would rather be outside it with you than inside it with——"

"Lilith," said Cecil, swiftly.

He stared at her. "What do you know about Lilith?" he demanded. "And why Lilith? Explain. I don't see a bit."

Cecil laughed wearily. "I can't," she said. "You reminded me of something a girl once said to me, but it's not that only. There is more. I know something I can't say. It's just as if I knew something deep down in me, only I don't know what it is that I know. Perhaps you will teach me. Yes, Chris, we must go on this trek."

He laughed triumphantly, forgetting everything else in his enthusiasm. "Hurrah," he cried, "that's settled anyway. And you will ride with me every day? I want to hear all about you, about your home, your school, everything. I know nothing, remember. You are you; that in a way is enough for me. But now that I have you, I want to know all there is to know. Will you tell me?"

"Anything and everything, my dear, I think," she said. "Only, Chris, there is really nothing to tell."

Then the sound of a motor broke suddenly on their ears. They looked at each other. "Oh I dread meeting him!" she exclaimed. "I feel as if he is bound to guess."

Chris moved quickly to her side and snatched a kiss. Then he caught her hand and held it steadily for a moment. "Little Eve," he said, "be brave. He can't guess. I'll come again soon. Now I'll go and meet him, and you hurry to the kitchen and come in afterwards. You can order more tea."

Hugh was in a good mood, and very pleased with himself. He had sold some young stock at an excellent figure, and the car had run well. He greeted Chris friendlily, and did not seem surprised when the other told him that his share of the arrangements for the trek were made. "But," he said, "for some unknown reason my wife is all at once dead against it. You'll have to help me overcome her objections. She's the sweetest little woman in the world, but when she gets a fit like this, I confess she is too tough for me."

Chris thought rapidly. He had to bank on Cecil's helping him, but he had on the other hand to make some reply at once. "I know," he said. "She's been giving me her views with my tea, and I've been trying to talk her over. I think she is keener now. It was some idea about not wanting to leave Ronnie that held her back, I think."

"Bless her," said Hugh. "But she wouldn't say that to me."

They entered the drawing-room from the stoep, and a second or two later Cecil came in. Hugh went over to her at once and kissed her. Chris bit his lip and looked away. "Well, my darling," said Hugh, "how's your headache? Did you get a sleep?"

"I'm all right, thank you," said Cecil, moving away from him, but avoiding Chris's eye. "Did you sell your stock? You're back early, aren't you?"

She poured out his tea and handed it to him, and offered

Chris another cup. He accepted and went over to the tray to get it from her, standing there with his back to Hugh and his eyes on her face. She just glanced at him as she handed it, appealingly he thought.

"So Ashurst has been persuading you as to the trek, has he?" said Hugh. "I hear he hopes he has been more successful than I."

"I told your husband," said Chris laughingly, before she could reply, "that I believed it was only the thought of Ronnie that kept you back. Why not get Mrs. Hardcastle to look after him for a bit? I'm sure she would."

"That's a good idea," said Hugh. "You know how he likes playing with her kiddies."

It seemed to Chris that Cecil was horribly ill at ease, while he was there, and he himself longed to go. He had lived easily and carelessly, but he had an Englishman's sense of honour. What he had done, he had done. His love had come in like a flood and swallowed everything. But now it seemed to him terrible to be sitting there as this man's guest with this secret at his heart. Yet he could not help it. He wished wildly that he could tell Hugh and that they could go out, there, into the bright sun and on to the velvet lawn with a couple of pistols, and settle it. But one didn't do that sort of thing nowadays. He fell to wondering what Hugh would say or do if he knew, and he could not make up his mind. He could not picture the man mad with anger, and yet he would undoubtedly view the whole affair from an old-fashioned point of view. Cecil was his wife. He, Chris, was proposing theft. That was how Hugh would think of it. It was all so crude, so horribly muddled, so impossible. But what could he do? Get up and go, and then blow his own brains out? Leave by the next mail? He swore to himself. He would not do that.

So he sat on, joining automatically in the conversation, covertly watching Cecil, horribly conscious of Hugh. After a shadow of defence, Cecil gave in to the trek proposals. Hugh was delighted; he was plainly now looking forward

to the whole thing. They discussed details. Cecil took, and lit for herself this time, another cigarette. Chris watched the poise of her head, noticed her little ears, the gleam that shot now and again in the sun through her hair, her ankle swinging beneath her as she lay back easily in her chair, her quick smoking. At last he could bear it no more, and he rose to go. She shook hands without looking at him, but as he followed her husband out on to the stoep, he glanced back. She was standing watching him with eyes like a caged wild thing's. And as she saw herself noticed, she stepped back quickly into the room.

"Well," said Hugh, "it only remains to hear what your cousin and Gwen have to say. Let us know as soon as you hear, will you? I'll go over my stores to-morrow and make a note of what's wanted. Someone will have to run over to Matatiele and see King at the hotel—perhaps we might both go. My wife might care for the run too. What do you say? The day after to-morrow? Very likely you will have heard from your cousin then."

Chris assented. "Yes," he said, "I'd like very much to go over with you. But don't you bother to go if you're busy. I can do it. I could take Mrs. Sinclair if you like, and she could show me the way."

"We'll leave it," said Hugh. "I'll go if I can. The day after to-morrow then. Better come up and have some lunch. Drop in any time, you know. We shall always be delighted to see you. Cheerio. Remember me to the Hardcastles. And oh, Ashurst, you might sound Mrs. H. about taking Ronnie. It would be the very best thing if they would have him."

"Right," said Chris, "I will. Cheerio."

Hugh waved his hand and Chris gave his mare her head.

He always rode recklessly, but he rode ten times more so now. The cheery friendliness of the other man pierced him like a spear. He hated himself, and the beat of his horse's hoofs maddened him. He half wished that she would slip and kill him. Easy, careless, morally lax enough, Chris had

however hitherto been honourable. But now, but now, but now . . . ? The question beat in the rhythm of his going. and he swore savagely to himself. And yet over it all rose the face of Cecil, and he knew that he had spoken to her but the literal truth. Nothing counted beside his love for her. It was all very well to talk of honour, of morality, of God;—they were less than the dust in the balance. To-day the question was more than he could face, but the fact stared at him. And when he thought of her alone now with the man he had just left, it made no odds that he was so sporting a fellow. He could almost have turned and ridden straight back. . . .

Pamela's answer was just what he expected.

"Dear Chris (her letter ran),

"The scheme sounds to me absolutely perfect. Father says I can have what I like and go when I please so long as he is left out of it, and he will gladly find you with horses and so on. He says you are his guest for the business. So tell the good folk at Springfontein that we will send our gear on ahead to Matatiele as arranged and motor over on the Saturday with them, for I'm writing to ask Cecil to put me up Friday night. You had better be there too.

"Yours affectionately,
"Pamela."

"P.S.—I'm riding over to Elandskop to-morrow in case Gwen wants assistance with 'daddy.'—P."

Gwen, however, required no assistance. Her father got his letter at lunch and read it through in silence. Then he glanced at her and smiled, passing it across the table. "There's a post-script for you, Gwen," he said, "but you'd better read the lot."

She read it through, and jumped up, to run round to him and cry enthusiastically: "Oh, dad, *do* let's go! We may, mayn't we? It will be perfect bliss!"

"What will be bliss?" asked Mrs. Eldred.

The letter was duly read to her. "Can you go?" she asked her husband.

"I think so, dear," he said. "It means leaving Len to look after the farm, and I expect he'd have rather liked to have gone. But one of us must stay. What do you say, Len?"

"What, go with all that crowd?" asked the young fellow. "No, thanks, not this child. You go, dad, and about Christmas I'll remember it and beg off for a run up to Rhodesia. I want to see Harold's place. So don't worry about me."

"So it only remains for you to say, mother," said Eldred.

"Oh go, dear," she said, "most certainly. Gwen will thoroughly enjoy it and it will do her good. I should be happier, too, if you were with her. Besides, she'll see some more of this wonderful Mr. Ashurst," she added, smiling.

The girl pouted. "Mother, I do wish you'd leave him alone," she said. "I know perfectly well that Cecil got engaged before she'd been six months back from school, but I'm not Cecil. Besides, I don't even like Mr. Ashurst, or at least not much, though he has been nicer lately. Still it will be a lovely trek with Hugh and Cecil and you, dad. It's what I've wanted for ages. What horse can I ride, daddy?"

There only remained Qacha's Nek. After many deliberations, the unanimous decision of the main conspirators had been that Hugh should write to his friend Mallory and boldly ask him and his wife to join them. This he did, and the two at Qacha's Nek consulted together.

The Camp or Government Reserve of Qacha's Nek consists of a horse-shoe shaped ring of European houses, a couple of stores, a church, and a jail just above the Pass that climbs into Basutoland from East Griqualand. The centre of the horse-shoe is an open sloping space of what is now rock and stone, for the heavy rains have finally washed it clean, and its open end lies towards the valley of the Orange River some ten miles away. The tops of mountains hem it in around except on this side, and a fostering Govern-

ment has set them with plantations of hardy trees. It lies very high, and except for its isolation, it would be hard to hit on a more lovely spot. Well-watered, it basks in the sun the greater part of the year, and the panorama of mountains beyond the Orange is superb. The morning mists drift over them, the sun dies behind them, and by day they raise their rocky heads into the serene blue.

The Mallorys' house was a little one, on the far side of the approach but near the top of the curve. Its back was towards the camp road, with a lawn-tennis court on one side and various out-houses on the other. The garden, more like an old-fashioned English garden than an African one, sloped down away from the house to a little stream. It was well-wooded, and below the lawn and flower beds, behind high hedges of sweet-scented shrubs, stretched the orchard and vegetable gardens. Little paths wound in and out of them, closely shaded with fruit trees and planted on either side with violets, fox-gloves and now and again roses. Here, in their seasons, were abundance of peaches, apples, cherries and plums. From the lawn, you could not see the camp, but the veld and hill-side stretched away till they were lost in fold on fold of the hills.

Mallory and his wife were keen gardeners, and had indeed made the place. She was dividing fox-gloves when he came in from the office with Sinclair's letter, a tall fellow in B.M.P. uniform.

"Here, Frances," he said, "what do you think of this?"

She read it through in silence, and then whistled. "Six of them," she said. "Heaven knows where we shall put them all, but thank goodness we've got some sheep."

He laughed. "It's pretty plain that if we put them up it can only be for a scratch picnic affair. But I should think Eldred and the girl had better go to the Residency—Bosworth would certainly take them if I asked him. He's quite a sportsman. Then we can manage. Hugh and his wife in the spare room, this Ashurst person in the bath-room, and the cousin in the little room on the stoep. I'll tell Hugh

that it'll all be a rough and ready business. But shall we go on with them?"

"I shan't. It's too much for me. But you can. Do; he's quite right, you must go on patrol some time soon and you might just as well go with them. You'd enjoy it. You know Pamela Urfurd too, don't you?"

"I've just met her," said Mallory absent-mindedly. He was thinking of a dark-haired excited girl with whom he had danced at a Matatiele Race Meeting Ball the year that Hugh had married her. It struck him that he would rather like to go.

"She's a queer woman, I think," said his wife. "I'm always expecting to hear that she has been mixed up in some scandal or another. She's just that sort."

"Good heavens, Frances," exclaimed Mallory, "I should never have thought so! What in the world makes you think that? As jolly a girl and as straightforward as ever I saw, I thought. Oh! . . . You mean Pamela Urfurd," he added lamely.

Frances Mallory laughed. She knew her husband. "Oh," she said, "so that's the way the wind blows! Now, my dear, I only saw Mrs. Hugh once but I feel pretty sure she could twist any man she pleased round her little finger, if she woke up. I think I shall come with you after all."

Mallory smiled. "Anyway I'll write and tell them to come," he said. "And let's hope Mrs. Sinclair is still asleep."

CHAPTER VI

KING, proprietor of the Imperial, was lurking in his bar when he heard the sound of their cars, and, tossing down his drink, he went out quickly to meet them. A few loungers in the shade of the blue-gums on the edge of the dusty square of the sleepy little town got up and strolled casually nearer. It was really rather an event. Matatiele has its show and an occasional ball, but for the greater part of the year its visitors are not more exciting than stray bagmen. On Saturday and Sunday, it is true, the hotel does better, for the surrounding farmers come in and put up there for a drink and possibly a meal; but this particular expedition had been filtering in for a week past and the principals were eagerly expected. Ashurst, for example, was now known to be a novelist, though naturally up to that time no one had heard of his books; but it would have been news to him to learn of Matatiele, as he now might do, that he had been co-respondent in a divorce case and was at least a millionaire. He would have been the last, however, to grudge the little town its thrill, and it was not to be wondered at that the whole outfit was as good to Matatiele as a travelling circus. There were the three cars, containing the six Europeans and three natives, and in addition two more boys were waiting there with a cavalcade of nineteen horses of their own, to say nothing of a mounted native police orderly whom Mallory had sent in with a letter of welcome to act as an escort into the Protectorate.

None of the girls had ever before trekked on such a scale, and they were all vastly excited. Sinclair took the lead very efficiently, and indeed it was he who had arranged things with King. So now he shook hands and asked that the

ladies might be shown their rooms. Eldred accompanied them along the corridor of the big rambling bungalow, and Hugh and Chris made their way into the bar. They had hardly ordered drinks when the elder man rejoined them, smiling.

"I say, Hugh," he said, "I hope you won't mind your arrangements being upset a little, but the girls insist on sharing one room. I told Cecil I'd come and placate you. They're each as mad as one another and like so many school girls, and will probably sit up half the night talking, but I should think it was best to let 'em. Pamela was to sleep in Gwen's room anyway, wasn't she? so it only means your being alone. Hope you won't mind."

Chris, glancing swiftly at him, saw that he did, and came promptly to the rescue. "Give your wife her head, Sinclair," he said laughingly, "for, from my vast experience of women, I should say it was always best."

Hugh's momentary ill-humour vanished, but he drained his glass, put it down and got up. "Right," he said, "but I'll just go and see that my wife has all she wants. Our things were all packed together."

Through the open door Chris saw him meet Cecil on the stoep, take her arm and return with her. It was nothing, but the sight angered him intensely. Hugh had a right to do that which he had not. Cecil, too, seemed to accept it so coolly. Of course she could not do otherwise, but small as the incident was, it served to disgruntle him.

Eldred meanwhile was chatting with the men in the bar. "What's it been like on the Berg?" he asked the bar-tender. "Fine? Frost yet?"

"No frost," said the man, "but pretty cold at night. I hope you've got blankets enough for the ladies. People this side don't realise what it can be like on that. I know, for before I got this job, I used to go round up there buying cattle for Milton and Esdras. Rotten game. Christ! the nights I've had!"

"Is there much game up there?" queried Chris.

"No, not much. You hardly ever see buck. The Government's got a reserve, but the niggers kill everything they can and the herd boys with their dogs do an awful amount of mischief. They run down the does with their young, and even massacre the small birds of the veld by giving the little beasts no time to rest and chasin' them till they drop. Damned shame, but you can't stop it. Still there are game birds of course in the wilder parts—partridge, duck, pigeon. I always took a gun and shot for the pot."

"One can buy skoff?" queried Eldred.

"Oh, you won't want for food. The niggers are very decent, I will say that. Besides if you're going with Mr. Mallory, they'll bring you presents of everything they have. It's a good thing to be a Government official up there, I can tell you. Not but what Mallory's not a very fine fellow, and well known in these parts too. One of the best in the service I think."

Laughter and talk sounded outside and they all turned to look. The three girls were coming out arm in arm, and Hugh was not to be seen. Pamela caught sight of her cousin, and drew the others to the door of the bar. "There you are," she said, "witness the lords of creation. Nobody offers us a drink. We are sent off to our rooms and told to unpack, but the men go straight to the bar. Come out of it, you two, or we shall come in."

"Let's," cried Cecil, and entered.

The bar-tender wiped the bar down, glanced at Chris, and smiled.

Her father put his hand on her arm. "We'll all go and get some tea," he said. "As a matter of fact it's ordered. After all, Cecil, we've had the job of driving the cars up here."

"I like that," said Gwen. "That's a mere excuse, daddy. We would have driven them if we'd had the chance. And probably better. Pam's got a bruise on her arm as big as a saucer as a result of Mr. Ashurst's bumping her into a small grave on the road."

Chris looked comically solemn. "Miss Eldred," he said, "nothing that I say or do is right with you. But you know I'm not used to your excellent roads out here. I am for ever being told that they are better than they used to be, but, try to believe though I do, it doesn't amount to much. However, let's go for the tea, and then what do you say to a stroll round the town to see the sights?"

Pamela chuckled as they left the bar. "There's a vast amount to see," she said.

"Shut up, Pam," said Gwen, "it's an excellent plan and there's heaps to see. Chris is quite right. Oh!" she exclaimed, suddenly realising that she had used his Christian name.

"Gwen," said Chris instantly, "that's perfectly splendid. I'm sure we don't want Mr. and Miss on this trek. Do let it be Chris."

"What about the Mrs.?" asked Pamela slyly.

Chris and Cecil shot a quick glance at each other which did not escape Pamela, and the latter had a horrible suspicion that she was blushing. But Chris laughed easily. "I shall have to approach Hugh on the subject," he said lightly.

Half way through tea, Sinclair came in. "Where have you been?" demanded Cecil. "The tea's half cold. Come and have a cup quickly, and then we're all off for a stroll."

"My darling," remonstrated Hugh, in his typical way, "you seem to forget that some one must see to the horses and the packing. There are all the packs to go through. It's no good leaving it to the boys. We're short of several straps as it is."

"Oh do be quiet, Hugh," exclaimed Cecil petulantly. "You always make a huge bother out of everything. We can see about them to-morrow."

Her husband said nothing, but shrugged his shoulders significantly and helped himself to bread and butter. Eldred took up his defence. "Cecil, my dear," he said, "Hugh's quite right. But you need not stay for us. He and I know

Matatiele well enough. We'll leave Ashurst—I mean Chris —to take you three round." And he smiled at that individual.

"Good!" exclaimed Chris. "Come on, then, let's go. Cigarettes? No? Well, I will anyway."

The four of them wandered off together and for a while walked in a body. They peered into sundry iron-faced stores with lounging natives at the doors, laughed at the Town Hall, stood to watch the arrival of four wagons from Basutoland, and then, at Chris's suggestion, climbed a bit of the way up a little kopje at the back of the town to get some idea of their road on the morrow. It was plain to be seen, a small dusty track winding away out of the iron roofs and barbed wire-enclosed gardens of the dorp into the lands and veld beyond. There it dipped for some small spruit, and then climbed a rise in the landscape and disappeared beyond. After a few miles it could be made out again, so they lifted their eyes from the plain and looked up to where, some twenty miles away, the great range shot its crags and peaks into the still air. The mountains were already purpling for the sun-set. Golden still where the sun fell on them, black in the shadows and brown below, their summits were even now washed with violet and blue tints. Calm, serene, seemingly illimitable, they sentineled the whole horizon. The four of them found some rocks on which to sit and watch, and silence fell on them.

Pamela broke it. "I long to be there," she said. "I sometimes wish I could live there always, but we cannot live in fairy-land. We can see it only. Besides, up there, it would not seem to be fairy-land any more and one would not even wish to stay. That is the rule in life, I suppose. Dreams are but dreams, and they never come true."

"Best not to go then," said the practical Gwen.

"Oh no," replied Pamela quickly. "Maybe our dreams are the better part of life. And besides it is very good on the Berg. One gets such a sense of one's own littleness.

It's all so silent and big. The native lands are only tiny patches here and there on the great slopes, and their huts little temporary shelters on the bosom of nature. That is all. Man is just nothing up there. It is as if a breath of wind might blow him away, and in a generation there would scarcely be a trace that he had been there."

"Yet according to you," said Cecil, looking at Chris, "men have mastered the world."

"They have in a sense," he said. "But Pamela's right. I can't take the other side to-night. After all, our science has but touched the borderland of the Unknown. It has lit a lamp—that's something truly, but the light chiefly serves to reveal the darkness."

Below them lights were beginning to twinkle in windows and served to illustrate his words. The four of them grew silent, watching them. Then Gwen spoke again. "And what of the darkness?" she said.

Chris did not reply at once. Then he turned to her with a smile. "Do you want a lecture?" he asked.

"I'll put up with one," she retorted, "if the others don't mind."

Pamela sighed, mockingly. "I know Chris," she said. "He can't help it occasionally."

"Well," said Chris, reaching out his hand and picking up a stone. "Look at this. The other day it was just a stone, no more. Now we know it is a mass of electrons, and in them is that very same energy that makes the world and drives the planets round the sun. But what is it? Whose energy is it? What is it all for? If we could only answer one question completely—just one—it would be something to go upon. But there is no answer. From this stone in my hand to the uttermost limits of the stars, mystery, mystery. That is all."

"And reality?" queried Pamela.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Probably what we think we feel and know is all one vast illusion. Not necessarily untrue, though. Only probably the truth, could we see it and

know it, would be so different from what we perceive that we should realise that the world as we see it is chiefly our own imagination."

"You make my brain reel," said Gwen, "only I don't half understand what you mean. Things seem real enough to me."

"Well," said Pamela, ignoring her, "and what then of the Berg, Chris?"

"Oh," he said, "the Berg is grim, solid, naked, to my seeing. I know that it deceives me, like all else, with its pretended reality, but it can deceive me as nothing else can. I feel as if on it I could throw speculation to the winds. I am at least a man. I can battle and grasp what I want, or die. A fig for yesterday, and for to-morrow! I have at least to-day. I may be dust, but I am living dust—to-day. Let me be beaten by the rain and whipped by the wind and kissed by the sun, but my heart beats through it all. I will live for my brief moment and snatch it from eternity, and then I will fall up there, on that grim face of rock, and Nature can do what she pleases with my dust. Mould a star or fashion worms—it will be all one then. But now is struggle, passion, love." And he ended abruptly.

"What about your soul?" asked Gwen coolly.

Chris looked at her, smiling. "Have I one?" he said, perhaps to see what she would say.

"Oh yes," she said, "of course you have. Could dust struggle, feel passion, love?"

Chris picked up his stone again and held it out to her. "This," he said, "is certainly struggling. One does not credit an electron with consciousness, but that is perhaps because we view ourselves out of all proportion. Insects certainly have passion. What is love?"

"It was you who named it," said Gwen. "You ought to know."

Chris weighed his stone meditatively in his hand, and then cast it away. "Let's go," he said shortly.

In descending, they separated into couples, and Chris and

Cecil brought up the rear. "Dear," he said as soon as they were sufficiently far behind, "I have scarcely had a word with you all day."

"Have you not?" she replied. "Well, you have had plenty of words just now. So you do not know what love is, Chris."

He started. "Little Eve," he said, "don't say that. I know that I love you; I said nothing in denial of that. If you press me, I don't know perhaps what this love is that I feel, but I know that I feel it. Even if it is not what it seems, it is something real enough, God knows. Oh Cecily, you don't doubt that I love you, do you? It is cruel of you. You give me no chance. If I had you alone for a few minutes I could teach you how much and how truly I love you. Darling, don't hurry now. Wait back a bit. If the others get on, we may have just the tiniest chance for a kiss. A day without a kiss seems hopeless to me now. That's what you've done to me, you Eve you!"

But she did not look at him and she did not slacken her pace. He tried to look into her face, but could not, and her remoteness seemed to him a colossal thing, overwhelming everything. In despair, he caught for a moment at her hand, his eyes on the backs of the two in front.

At that the little gloved fingers pressed his and she turned her head to look at him. There were tears in her eyes. "Oh Cecily, Cecily," he cried. "What is it? What have I done?"

"Nothing, Chris," she said, "and besides I can't put it into words. It seems to me that I am beginning to see what a woman is. You doubt your own soul, you ask questions about love, but a woman does neither. She cannot. She knows. Perhaps you think I know no better because I can explain nothing, but I feel, Chris. There's something awakened in me that seems millions of years old. When you talk like that I feel as if you were just a child, a boy growing old enough to be a bit daring and break things

wilfully in an endeavour to see their works. Oh how I love you, Chris, but I want to mother you to-day, you big silly stupid man!"

They walked some yards before he replied. In truth he could scarcely do so. When he did, he showed her instantly what he felt. "And I, Eve dear," he said deliberately, "would give all knowledge and the whole world and my own life also if I could lie with my head in your lap and let you mother me. Do you suppose anything matters beside that?"

Cecil reached out her hand to him this time. "Oh," she cried, "what a muddle it all is after all! Do you know, as you say that, I realise suddenly that that would not content me?" She dropped her voice a little. "When you think you are strong, Chris, then I feel that you're very weak and I want to mother you, but the moment you submit and are weak, instantly I don't want to mother you at all! There is something in me that seems to say that you must not be weak and that I must not allow you to be. Chris, will you hate me? Will you think it an awful thing for me to say? But I cease to want to mother you; I want instead to be mother of your child."

The man's hand holding hers gripped so strongly at that that she feared she must cry out. "Cecil," he said, "I will tell you what I think. Never have I heard a woman say a holier, purer, more wonderful thing. And never have I understood for a moment before what it might mean to have a child."

"Haven't you?" said Cecil, so low that he hardly heard. "Well, Chris, I don't know that I have either. I never thought of it when I married Hugh—at least, that is, although I knew it was a thing that happened, I never wanted it much. I don't know that I wanted anything much. Do you know I once talked to Pam about it, and she horrified me by what she said. Love seemed to me an easy and pleasant thing, but there was no passion in it. I didn't

understand what it would be to have a lover, or to be a lover either. But now, oh now I know."

"Eve, Eve all the time," said Chris smiling, but with his eyes afire. "But surely that just settles it, doesn't it?" he asked her. "I won't press you now, darling; we've got three weeks of trek ahead of us; but you know you can't fight fate. You are my mate, Cecily; that's why you feel like that. And I love that word. It's a big strong word, with no shams about it. And it's the naked truth, darling, about you and me."

The path entered a little growth of pines here, and under their evergreen boughs the shadows clustered thickly. The others were on ahead, and here then he stayed her. "One kiss, Eve dearest," he begged; "one kiss."

She peered forward. "It's madness," she whispered; "suppose we were seen?" And yet with the very words she flung her arms about his neck and hung on his lips as if to drink his life. As suddenly she released him. "Chris," she said, "if I were sure the ship would sink, I'd run off with you this night to Durban and we'd take the first mail away to anywhere. If I were sure it would sink, Chris. I could die with you, my darling, but God knows if I can live with you." And she turned swiftly and hurried out of the trees.

They caught the others up, and without any apparent plan, Pamela and Cecil were soon leading, the other two following. Gwen had a sudden impulse of friendship towards the man at her side, coupled with a sense of fearlessness. She pushed her hand into his arm, and he glanced down at her, not a little surprised. She met his eyes frankly and laughed.

"Chris," she said,—"it's really rather fun to call you Chris —I'm so happy. I can't help it. We are going to have a glorious time, aren't we? I wish I knew why I felt so hugely bucked all at once. Perhaps it's this perfect evening. Even this ugly tin town looks jolly, doesn't it? with the lights in the windows and that glorious smell of *liso** fires somewhere blowing ever so faintly across one's face. And we're

* *Liso* (Sesuto), dried dung.

going to have a scrumptious dinner, a humorous evening, and to-morrow the first day of my first real experience of a ride out into the wilds. I feel as if I were still sixteen. Do you ever feel like that?"

Her enthusiasm infected him. "You make me," he said. "Gwen, I wish we were all sixteen. But we'll pretend that we are—if we can," he added. "Look here, let's race to the hotel by a back way and be drinking sun-downers by the time the others appear."

"Splendid," she cried. "I know the way. Round here."

The two fled swiftly through the dusty straight streets, crossed waste bits of land and at least one back yard, and found themselves in the rear courtyard of the hotel. A man was emerging from the stables. Gwen darted up to him. "Come on, Hugh," she cried breathlessly. "Chris and I have left the others walking along as if they were in Durban. Come to the stoep and let's be having drinks when they arrive."

Hugh shot an amused glance at Chris, but he quickened his pace and smiled at his sister-in-law. "Three years in England haven't made much difference to you," he said.

Gwen flushed suddenly in the dark. "Oh yes, they have," she retorted. "I've grown up all right, Hugh. I've learnt all my lessons—that it's no good crying at life among them. And I've learned to take a weak whisky and soda. So go and order it quickly."

She and Chris seated themselves in long comfortable chairs and were joined by Hugh with the drinks in a few minutes. There the others found them. Pamela and Cecil stood together on the steps of the hotel against the faint glow of the dying day across the open square, and a smile was playing on Cecil's face. The two were a curious contrast. Pamela looked reserved, and something about her suggested strength and loneliness; Cecil, one arm on her friend's shoulder and the other swinging her hat, had an almost lazy look of content about her. Her eyes wandered from one to the other of the two men, and she seemed to both altogether desirable.

"Oh," she said, "you beasts! And I'm dead tired. Hugh, do get me a drink too."

"You shouldn't have gone so far, my darling," he said. "You'll only tire yourself out before our real trek begins."

"Oh don't scold, Hugh," she said, "and besides it's too late now. Fetch me a drink instead or I shall ask Ulysses. That, by the way, is what Pamela and I have settled to call that lazy creature on your right, Gwen, who makes no effort to get me a chair."

Both rebuked men sprang up to her bidding. Chris drew a chair up and deliberately placed it near his own and their eyes met in the light of the opening bar door, whither Hugh was disappearing for the drinks. There was an almost sensuous challenge in hers which he met by a sudden resumption of that cool manner of his which she had noticed in Durban. Each had that sense of familiarity again, but now they were aware of a mutual consciousness of it. Pamela, meanwhile, had seized a cushion from a chair and had seated herself on it at the top of the steps, half turned away from them, her face in her hands.

"Why Ulysses?" demanded Gwen.

"Because he wandered so much, of course," said Cecil.

"My dear Ces," said her sister, "you never thought of that. You can't kid me. But it fits in somehow." And Ulysses Chris became in the common talk of the party.

Dinner was an uproarious meal. They were the only guests, and inclined to be merry at the expense of the hotel. The dining-room, walled as well as ceiled with ceiling boards, yellow and fly-blown, boasted two or three crude pictures, some strips of looking glass painted with flowers, and a corner bracket with a bowl of paper roses. The oil lamp above them, with its tin shade and guard and staring light, had rarely shone on a gayer party. Hugh entirely forgot the cares of this world, and it was Eldred who insisted on champagne. Afterwards Gwen vamped on a piano in the corner and they sang every song or bit of a song that they could think of. Then they cleared the room and danced.

Mine host was invited in, and with African camaraderie made gay with them. The three girls went off to bed together, and laughed and joked themselves into the sheets and pretty soon to sleep. It was an auspicious evening for their first.

The start in the morning was a great event. The stoep was littered with saddles and packs, and the horses, fetched from the stables, were fastened to its wooden posts in groups. One by one they were led apart from their mates for a couple of boys to saddle and pack, Hugh and Eldred busy with advice and caution, tightening a strap here and there, balancing bags and generally supervising. Chris did what he could, but he did not know the ropes as the other two. So presently he lit a cigarette and joined the girls to watch.

At last the train was set in motion, and with cries and crackings of whips set off. The pack horses led the way, and an old grey pony of Eldred's plainly knew the road and proposed to be leader. He put back his ears and bit out at any animal that tried to pass him, taking the route to the Nek as soon as the natives got him within sight of it. The others followed, neighing, tossing their heads and swishing their tails. The police orderly brought up Sinclair's horse, but he himself went for his wife's. Gwen naturally fell to Chris, Pamela to Eldred. In a little knot together they finally rode off, the orderly bringing up the rear. The spirit of adventure settled upon all of them, and Pamela hit it off to Mr. Eldred. "The soul of our nomadic forefathers," she said, "lives in all of us yet."

"Come on," said Hugh, at the end of a mile or so, "let's get in front of the packs now. They're going all right and there's no danger of their missing the road. I mostly believe in keeping my packs in front of me in the mountains," he added to Chris. "One can see if anything goes wrong, and it doesn't do to out-distance them too far; but here it will be pleasanter ahead and out of the dust."

They cantered away together, dropping into a gallop on some smooth turf by the edge of a land to pass the caravan.

The old grey obviously resented this, taking up the pace gallantly despite his age and burden, but they were too quick for him. When they took the road again, Chris and Cecil were leading.

"Have you been up here before?" he asked her.

"Yes, but only in a car," she said. "Then we had to stick to the road, but to-day we can take a good many short-cuts. There's one—see?—straight on where the road winds, across that stream and up under that kopje. Oh, Chris, isn't it a glorious morning?"

He glanced back cautiously to see if the others were out of earshot, and then replied. "Lovely, darling," he said. "I'd like to ride with you like this to the world's end. I love to see you in riding kit. You look such a girl, Cecily."

She threw him a look. "You say those things too easily. It means long practice, I fear."

"Oh I say, now don't begin that," he cried. "You really mustn't. I thought we'd finished with such things. And I get no chance of stopping you, especially on ahead of the others like this. When we climb up that path far ahead, will you drop to the rear, my Eve?"

"I don't know," she said, but she smiled and he did not doubt that she would.

On and on, ever nearer to the peaks ahead, they mounted. The wind sang in their ears; the shadows of little clouds chased each other across the hill-sides. At times they rode for some miles over open country, keeping well together; at another, the path skirted a stream and climbed over a stony rise and they had to string out. At last they entered a valley. Chris and Hugh were behind here, and the latter turned in his saddle to look back.

"This is the entrance to the Pass," he said. "It's a slow game going up, but it's the Pass all right. Where are those packs? Oh yes, coming on. See those two peaks ahead? Well, we go through them. There's the first sugar-bush. It grows up the sides of the valley all the way."

"Where's the wagon road?" queried Chris.

"Away to the left. We shall join it later on. Look back; you can see it almost all the way to the dorp from here. And that's the last you'll see of Matatiele. I wonder what we have before us before we see that again."

"I wonder," said Chris. It was as well that was all either of them could do.

But it was so. They had been steadily mounting, and were now a thousand feet or more above the level of Matatiele. The plain between them and it looked as flat as a pancake despite the ups and downs they knew were there. Before, the road was at last visible again, serpentining up from the left and disappearing ahead in the folds of the mountains. Soon they were on it, and began now to follow. At times there was a steep fall on the right from the very edge to the tumbling water of a stream far below, and at times a regular wall of rock towered up on their left-hand side. Every half-mile saw the valley narrow and steepen. Again and again one would swear that the rise in front was the summit, but it never seemed to be when one was there. No huts were visible, but on a sudden turn they came at length on a dozen convicts working on the road with an armed native escort. Prisoners and guard seemed on friendly terms, and all smiled at the white people. The guard however saluted, and Eldred remarked to Chris that the presence of the party meant that the camp was not so far off now. Indeed just here was a wire fence, a narrow strip of a thing, skirting their road and running across the face of the mountains to the left.

"The boundary of Basutoland," said Hugh.

Cecil whipped up her pony. "Come on," she called. "Round the bend is the gate."

Chris and Hugh rode up to her on either side, and the three abreast they swept round the corner. There, ahead, on an open platform as it were, was their fence with great open gates in it, a couple of huts on the farther side, and three wagons out-spanned on the trampled and bare ground nearer to them. "The gate!" cried Cecil again.

The three raced up and through it, the police guard saluting again, entered together and drew up on the road beyond. A superb panorama lay before them. Away to the south-west stretched a wide valley, soaring mountains on either hand, until it appeared to meet another coming from north. Beyond the junction nothing was visible but tumbled mountain masses, with great rifts, fantastic spurs and crags, and noble faces of grass and rock. From their feet the ground fell unevenly to a narrow plain broken by rocks and miniature valleys, with a river flashing here and there among the few trees that guarded it. To their right, the road wound down between newly planted enclosures of young firs and pines, twisted to the left, and disappeared to the right again by a towering castle of sheer rock.

"Where's the camp?" demanded Chris, looking about him, for there was no house in sight.

"You'll see it, once we're round that rock there," answered Cecil. "That's the golf course down there, and that field is the hospital—or where it is to be anyway. Round that corner you'll see the houses."

The others joined them, and reined up as they had done. Chris leant towards Cecil. "Don't let's wait," he said. "Lead on with me."

She glanced at her husband and the rest. Then, flicking her pony with her whip, she called to him. "Good-bye, Hugh. I'm going on with Ulysses. I'm dying to be there."

Hugh shouted a caution, but they were already away. They did not speak, but rode neck and neck, the horses delighting in the race and plainly realising that the camp lay ahead. Exultation shot through Cecil and she threw care to the winds. "On, on, on," she called to her companion. "Side by side into the mountains! Isn't it jolly, Chris? Don't pull up to talk."

Round the bend, along the straight, hoofs pounding on the thick turf; past the young trees, past a native or two, round the rock at last. The camp burst on their view. There, then, Cecil slowed down a little, riding at an easy canter,

health radiating from her, her cheeks flushed with the exercise, her eyes alight for him. She pointed out the houses with her riding whip. "Those are the Government offices, dear," she said—"see, that cluster of buildings in the trees to the left. The doctor's house is opposite. . . . This is the Residency; up here on the right. That's the new church they're just building. . . . That's the gaol, and those huts up the valley are the police quarters. . . . That's the Mallorys' place, round the corner, first house among the trees. That's their stable across the road on our left. Those are stores down there, and—oh, look, there's Mr. Mallory, coming to the gate!"

"Do you like him, Cecil?" asked Chris hurriedly.

"Oh he's a dear," she said. "He danced with me so nicely at the ball in Matatiele the year I was married. We sat out afterwards in the garden and he was perfectly charming. Only I was too full of Hugh, then, to think much about it."

"Well, don't be too nice to him now, Eve, will you?" begged Chris. "Think of me. Spare me a look sometimes that other people don't get."

"You get too much already," she said, laughing.

"But I haven't had a proper kiss to-day," he replied.

There was no time for her to answer. Cecil reined in her pony, and the tall man advanced from the gate to shake hands with her and help her to dismount. "How do you do, Mrs. Sinclair," he said. "Where's everybody else? We are expecting a dozen or so of you!"

"Oh they're coming," she said laughing. "Mr. Ashurst and I rode on. We've had a heavenly ride. May I introduce you—Mr. Ashurst, Mr. Mallory. Oh there's Mrs. Mallory!" And she left the men together.

The whole party arrived soon after, and most of the camp appeared to turn out to see them. There was much talking and laughter and unpacking and stabling to be seen to, and then Mr. Eldred and Gwen walked over to the Residency according to plan. Mallory went with them, and the rest of the party sat talking on the lawn or wandered off into the

garden. It did not take much scheming for Chris and Cecil to find themselves separated from the others. At the end of one of the walks, screened by apple trees, he caught her hand and brought her to a standstill.

"Complete my day for me, dearest," he begged.

She glanced round, and then held up her lips for his kiss.

The act had a kind of solemn quietness about it which their kisses had not had before. It was perhaps the serene beauty of that garden, or the silence of the hills which already wrapped them in. Cecil remained standing before him, searching deep into his eyes. "How soon would you tire of that, I wonder?" she said.

He protested it would be never, but his words only drew a little smile about her mouth. "Oh Chris," she said, "I feel centuries old again to-night. How many women have asked that question, and how many men have made that answer, do you suppose? Men, I think, are never satisfied for long. Nor would you be with me. Women are built differently somehow."

Chris dropped his eyes before her, and when he looked up he was very grave. "Little Eve," he said, "you are more right than you know perhaps. Nature makes fools of us all. But tell me, can you honestly say that that is the last word? Is there nothing real, nothing lasting? Is there, for it comes to this, no such thing as love at all?"

She shook her head, without words.

"Nor do I believe it," he said. "There is something deeper. We continually seek it, and I have found it in you."

"How do you know?" she persisted.

"How does one know anything?" he retorted. "What did we say last night? Why, you cannot even ultimately prove that two and two make four, but maybe Pascal was right and all true knowledge is intuitive. The heart has its reasons that the head knows not of. For some reason or another your kisses mean more to me than other kisses, that I know. I can conceive that I shall kiss other women, maybe many other women, but you are my Eve. There will not be an-

other Eve, no, not whatever happens. A deep in me calls to a deep in you, and I believe that you know it."

Cecil fingered his jacket, the afternoon sunlight filtering through the leaves and falling on her, the earth standing warm and firm beneath her feet, the wind of its motion just stirring her hair. Two infinitesimal atoms in inconceivable infinity, they both of them looked at that moment on the veiled face of what men have called God. And if neither understood, both had some kind of realisation of it.

"You are right, Chris," she said. "You are very wonderful to me, dear. You know so much more than I do, though that is not saying much, but—if I can explain it—you and you only have brought a feeling to me that I never had before. I feel with you as if great infinite gulfs opened up at my feet and I peered down into them. And I think you are right; there is that by instinct between us which men and women have consecrated by marriage down all time."

"Then, Cecil," said Chris gravely, "it only remains for us to take our destiny in both hands and step out upon it."

"Does it?" she queried. "I wonder."

"How can you wonder?" he begged. "If we hesitate we may lose all that makes life other than the shadow show I told you I have found it until now."

She shook her head. "No, Chris," she said, "you mustn't say that. Surely it can never now be only that. Nothing can in a sense separate us, if we are right. Here or elsewhere, now or later, how can we say? but somewhere, sometime, we must enter into the life that is to be lived together. But as for *now,* I don't know. You forget that I am not alone in the world, Chris. There is more than myself to be thought of."

"But Hugh——" he began.

She made an impatient gesture. "It's not he, Chris. You forget a bigger person. There's Ronnie."

Mrs. Mallory came, calling for them through the gardens.

CHAPTER VII

HALF the charm of South Africa lies in its variety. A traveller may pass in a few hours from modern city to Boer dorp, from homely farm to native kraal, from colonial homestead to Indian settlement. He may lose himself in forests, struggle through bush, wander over seemingly illimitable prairie, or risk his neck in rocky mountain fastnesses. He may fish trout in Natal and think he is in Scotland, or shoot hippopotami in Zululand and be sure he is in tropical Africa. Basutoland, on the Free State border, is amazingly like southern Spain; and one might open one's eyes suddenly in Constantia and be forgiven for mistaking it for Italy. There are streets in Johannesburg that are definitely English, and others in Bloemfontein which are as obviously Dutch. A newcomer has an odd feeling that he doesn't know where he is or what he will be expected to do next; if the gentleman about to enter his railway carriage will be English or Continental, learned or ignorant, a Boer or a baronet, Western or Oriental. He may turn out to have shot your brother in the siege of Ladysmith and fought by your side on the Somme. You may find that he is familiar with every yard of Piccadilly, or that he has lived for three years in the Karoo without a rain shower and with scarcely a visitor. He may turn out to be a Dutch predikant, an English clergyman with the Oxford manner, or a Trappist monk. On the other hand he may be an American missionary engaged in propagating among the aborigines of Africa a religion of which you have never heard.

But South Africa can offer one experience at least which cannot be paralleled anywhere else under the sun. Yet few know of it, and of those who do, few realise its wonder and

beauty. A week's trek on the Natal border of Basutoland stands by itself in experiences, and such a trek began in earnest for Cecil, Chris and the rest of them on that Sunday morning in Qacha's Nek.

At first the track lay out of the camp, over a shoulder of mountain which soon hid all traces of a white settlement, and up a valley that smiled and sang in the sun. The little path wound through lands of mealies and Kaffir corn wherein flowered scarlet gladioli like poppies in East Anglian corn, and crossed and re-crossed a crystal-clear stream, bordered with blue forget-me-not and yellow ragwort, that laughed its way round many boulders and over a pebbly bed. Here and there, under the flanking cliffs, nestled the brown huts of native villages set among peach trees and poplars. Slow sleek cattle pastured between the cultivated patches, watched by brown urchins who fought mimic wars with dead mealie stalks, or piped, like Greek shepherds, on home-made flutes. Then it reached the head of the valley, crossed a wide stretch of upland grass and grey stone dotted with bleating sheep, and emerged as a tiny trail that ever ascended a steep mountain side and along which it was imperative to ride in single file. As it rose higher and higher, the unsurpassed panorama opened up—a world of peaks and chains of peaks seen across a river valley ten to fifteen miles wide, which sloped precipitously from the very path on which they rode.

In and out, in and out, and now sharply to the right, and then below lies Griqualand and far Natal, eight thousand feet below, towns and hills and rivers dwarfed to toy things asleep in the sun. Now the Border path is no longer possible and they must descend towards that world below. There is a semi-tropical vegetation here—a multitude of wild flowers; sweet-scented, strange-looking, pink-flowered sugar bush; high lush grasses; muddy streams; and thickets of willow, blue-gum and oak. The sun streams down, and Cecil wonders if Hugh and Mallory riding ahead will ever stop; if the packs, which started an hour before them, are never to be found off-saddled for a midday rest. But it

comes at last. They wind down the flank of a steep kopje to a river, and see that across it the horses are being freed, and are trotting off to roll in the grass or drink at the stream while all their impedimenta is spread around.

"Hungry, Ces?" queried Mr. Eldred, who found himself by her side.

"No," she said, "or at least I don't think so, but I'm dying for tea, and I want to get out of this saddle and stretch on the ground. We seem to have been riding hours and hours. How long shall we rest here?"

"An hour," said her father, "and not a moment more. I told you trekking up here wasn't all a picnic. After lunch we must do three hours more at least."

"Which way do we go?" queried Cecil. "It's a wonder to me that anyone knows the road at all. Sometimes you can hardly see a path, and even when you can, it is usually only one of half a dozen. I haven't an idea whether we're riding north, south, east, or west. Except that the mountains are in Basutoland and they're to the left more or less, I shouldn't know in the least where I am."

Eldred laughed. "The boys know," he said, "and so do Hugh and Mallory. It's easier than it looks. But what comes next, I don't know. Here's Hugh; he'll tell us."

Hugh was waiting for them by the stream, in a khaki shirt with his sleeves rolled up, erect, capable and vigorous.

"Oh Hugh," cried Cecil, "I thought we were never going to get lunch. Why did you go so far without off-saddling?"

"My darling, we had to. We've to think of a place with water, shade, grass and no lands for the horses to get into. But come on over. Then up there, among those trees, you'll find a perfect place. Gwen and Pam have gone up there already."

"How much farther to the store you spoke of?"

Hugh turned his horse and stared out at the Range. "See that pinnacle sticking out over there?" he said. "Well, Ramatseliso's is just behind it. It's a couple of hours or so, up the pass, from here. But we don't sleep there. We

must push on an hour at least beyond. I don't want all this outfit mixed up around the store."

Their horses stumbled through the stream, and Chris, who had been getting out stores, came up before Hugh could dismount to hold Cecil's bridle and give her a hand. His eyes were alight with excitement and good humour. Off and on he had ridden with her most of the morning, the two playing a sort of game of their own. "That's enough," she would say; "go and ride with Gwen now." Or he would range up alongside and the two of them discreetly edge back a little. "I've been with Pamela for half an hour," he would declare, "and I must talk to you now." So here he was to help her dismount, despite Hugh. "Oh," she said wearily, "I am tired. Is tea nearly ready?"

But Hugh was close behind. "Come, my darling," he said; "I'll show you the way."

He led her off, and Chris stood for a moment thinking. Then he spoke to his own boy and they soon had another kettle of hot water ready. This, with a basin, a towel and some eau-de-cologne, he forthwith carried to the shady poplars.

The girls had found an ideal place. Big roots of ancient trees offered armchairs, and the ground was soft and mossy. The poplar leaves rustled in the breeze around them, and through their screen one could see the river and the horses some hundred feet below. Cecil was lying on her back, staring up at the green shade above, Pamela sitting watching her, Gwen swinging half up a tree. Gwen saw him come. "Ulysses!" she exclaimed, "you do wander to some advantage! How perfectly priceless. Get up you two and take the things. Warm water to wash in—think of that! And is the skoff nearly ready, Wanderer?"

He poured out the water, and held the basin a moment for Cecil while she laved her hands. She smiled slowly at him, and his hands trembled as he knelt by her side. That was the moment of the whole off-saddle to him.

An hour later, Hugh got to his feet and reached for his

sjambok. "Come," he said; "get a move on. The boys are driving in the horses, and we may as well start ahead of the packs. We must call at the store, and they'll catch us up there."

"Hugh," declared Cecil, "I can't move. I'm too happy for words."

"My darling," he began, but Mallory interrupted him, getting up himself, showing how unusually tall he was with that strong face of his and what Cecil had already called to Chris (thereby considerably annoying that adventurer) 'understanding' eyes beneath bushy eyebrows.

"Mrs. Sinclair," he said, "I understand that at one time this expedition talked of reaching Mont aux Sources. But it won't get to the Tselike if it goes on like this."

Cecil laughed, and Gwen sprang over and caught her hand. "Get up, you lazy creature!" she cried.

Mallory put on his somewhat ancient and too small Irish tweed deer-stalker cap, and picked up the kettle. "It's worth being tired," he said. "Wait till to-night, when you really ache, but when you can sit round the fire and not move, while the stars come out and the moon gets up."

"Oh, heavenly!" cried Cecil; and the whole party moved away.

The road up the pass to the store is a wagon-road running up from Griqualand. It serpentined slowly and rather annoyingly, and Chris found himself leading with Mallory. Hugh had stuck tightly to his wife since luncheon. The store itself occasionally appeared in view, only to disappear as they dipped again or skirted round another corner. It was a stark iron ugly building in the centre of a space of trampled bare earth scattered with sheds, wagons, heaps of gear and piles of grain bags and wool-packs. Behind it was the dwelling-house, standing in a garden of young pines not more than shoulder high as yet, and behind, around, beyond, veld, mountain and more veld.

"Who is his nearest neighbour?" asked Chris.

"Well," said Mallory, "the store at Sehlabathebe's, I suppose, but there is nothing much to go there for. If he wants society, he has to come to camp or get down into Griqualand."

"By Jove, it's a lonely life," said Chris.

Mallory tapped his leg with his riding-whip and looked thoughtful. "It is," he said, "but it altogether depends on the man. Old Bartlow, here, is jolly enough, as you'll see. You see he's busy all the day, and he has his accounts for the evening. Most of the time, the place hums with natives. But the extraordinary thing is that a man gets used to it, and pretty soon ceases to care for most of the occupations which you would think he wanted to help him out. Many of these store-keepers scarcely read a book, or, if they do, only the trashiest sort of novel. Of course there are exceptions, but look round when we get in here and see what you see. It shows the adaptability of human nature. Personally I like the life. I spent a couple of years at Mokhotlong once, which is a good deal more lonely than this, and enjoyed it. One has one's dogs, some shooting, patrols when you want exercise, and long evenings to read in, over a roaring fire. For it can be cold up there, I can tell you. I've seen it look like an Arctic scene for weeks on end."

"What did you read?" queried Chris interestedly.

Mallory laughed. "Well, to tell you the truth, I was quite keen just then on Christian Science and Psychology generally."

Chris whistled. "Good enough," he said. "We must have some talks. Lor,' if I'd dropped in out of the snow and found you up to the neck in Psychology! I should have been more than a little surprised."

"There can be surprising exhibitions of human nature even at Mokhotlong," said Mallory, and could not know that he prophesied.

They rode up to a gate in the boundary fence and a native came running with a key. He took their horses, and

Mallory led the way to the store. A short stout white man came out to meet them, and shook Mallory's hand heartily. "Glad to see you," he said, and looked at Chris. Mallory introduced him. "Glad to meet you," he said, in the typical colonial way.

Chris caught Mallory's eye smiling at him, and as Bartlow went forward to meet the others, he smiled back interrogatively. "I'm never quite sure what one ought to say to that," he said.

"Try: 'Your sentiments do you credit,'" said Mallory, laughing. "That, at least, is what I'm always tempted to say. But possibly our friend would not catch on."

The little man seemed in no sense perturbed by an influx of seven visitors. He called to a boy to make tea and led the way into his sitting-room, saying cheerfully to Pamela, whom he appeared to take for Mrs. Sinclair owing to the general nature of the introductions and perhaps because she had come up with him, that he was delighted to see them. Hugh, as usual, was waiting with an eye to the arrival of the packs. Chris and Cecil walked up the path together.

"What a quaint little place!" she exclaimed. "How would you like to live here?"

"I think it would be topping," he replied, "given one condition."

"What's that?" she demanded, knowing full well what he would say.

"That you were here too," he said. "I picture it a paradise—long quiet evenings, just you and I."

Her eyes sparkled. "You're rather a dear, Chris," she said. "But, to be honest, it wouldn't suit either of us. I doubt it would even do you for a honeymoon. No, Chris, don't. . . . For goodness' sake, take care; Hugh will see."

"I shall kiss you in this house," he said, challengingly. "What do you bet?"

"You daren't," she retorted, and they entered together.

The furniture was varnished pine and green plush. The

carpet was green with red roses. There was a gramophone and a heap of dusty novels, a piano plainly not used, and a huge disorderly pile of newspapers and monthly magazines. Bartlow bustled about, finding chairs.

"Do you play, Mrs. Sinclair?" he demanded of Pamela. "If so, we must have some music to-night. I like a piano, though I can't play it. Looks homely, I think."

Gwen exploded into her handkerchief and pretended to cough violently. "Is your cold worse, Gwen?" asked Chris instantly. "I must rub you with Elliman's to-night."

"Let me get you some of Wood's Great Peppermint Cure, Mrs. Ashurst," exclaimed Bartlow. "It's excellent stuff, and I always keep some handy." And he actually hurried out after it, before anyone could stop him.

Gwen collapsed. Even Pamela burst out laughing, trying to say something coherent about the mixture of personalities there would be that night. Cecil, the tears running down her face, insisted on Chris behaving. Mallory, hugely amused, backed him up, and walking to the gramophone, discovered a record of "To-night's the Night," which he promptly put on. Then Hugh came in, and having missed the conversation, was considerably mystified and inclined to be annoyed. "Really, my darling," he said to Cecil, "you must take care. Bartlow will be awfully hurt."

"Oh Hugh," gasped Cecil, "I really can't help it. For heaven's sake go and find him. If he comes back with the medicine, I shall die."

But he did not. He couldn't find it, and when he said he would look again later on, he seemed quite dismayed to learn that the whole party were not going to camp there and invade his house. "You won't find hospitality to beat this in many places," said Mallory aside to Chris, and the latter agreed. It was typical of the country.

Tea came in a diversity of cups, and at length Hugh and Mallory went off to see to the saddling up of the horses. Chris was searching among the records. Gwen wanted to see if she could get some toilet article she had forgotten

from the store, and Eldred went with her. "Come on," said Pamela to the others, "we must go."

"One more record," pleaded Chris, and put on "The Rosary." Pamela fled in dismay.

Cecil rushed over to take it off. Chris threw his arm about her and kissed her lips. "Thank you, Eve of all Eves," he said.

"Oh Chris," whispered Cecil, "if Pam had seen!" He kissed her again promptly, and then Pamela was heard calling for Cecil outside. She ran out hastily. Chris followed, putting a small plume of dried and stained pampas grass from the mantel-shelf in his coat.

Hugh had already despatched the packs. He had decided with Mallory to camp about five miles on at the head of a grassy slope in a wide valley close to the Border, and thither they all set out. The road was a little dull. It was still a wagon track here, and wound about interminable curves of bare hillside, now in view of the Border fence, and now offering grand panoramas of the Basuto side. Hugh set off with Cecil in front, and Chris brought up the rear with Pamela.

The girl rode slowly, so that they gradually but imperceptibly fell behind, and at first for the most part silently. Chris had his own thoughts, and she startled him when she said suddenly: "Chris, are you serious?"

"Serious?" he queried, wholly in the dark; "what do you mean?"

She surveyed him thoughtfully. "Chris," she went on, "we know each other fairly well. I like you immensely, but I'm under no delusions about you. If it were another girl, I shouldn't care a damn, but I love Cecily."

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "What have you seen?"

Pamela sighed. "I saw it coming in Durban," she said. "You turned her head at Three Springs that Sunday. All Thursday and Friday night at their place last week you watched her every movement, and a blind man might have suspected her. If you want to make love to a married

woman you should cultivate a less committal look in your eyes. And at the store you both stayed behind to kiss."

"Do you think Hugh has seen anything then?" he demanded, not attempting to evade the charge.

Pamela shrugged her shoulders. "God knows," she said. "He's a queer creature, but I'm very fond of him too. Probably not, though. He would not dream it of Cecily."

"Would you?" asked Chris.

Pamela considered this in silence for a while. Then she said: "No, I don't think I should have done. That is why I ask you if you are serious. I'll be honest with you, Chris. I think Cecily loves you as she has never before known what it was to love, and I think that, because she is not the girl to flirt with you. I've known her a long time now. When she married, I was doubtful, but something she said made me think it was all right. But now you've appeared, a *deus ex machina*. Still, the mischief is not irreparable. You ought to clear out of this at once, cousin mine."

"Pamela," said Chris solemnly, "I'll not go without her. You may believe me or you may not, but I love her as you yourself acknowledge you think she loves me. I absolutely worship her. I've never seen anyone like her. Oh Pamela—believe me if you can—I'd do anything for her. Literally, I'd die for her. She's so little and pure and lovely. She's such a child, and her love is wonderful."

"Therefore," said his cousin drily, "you'd drag her as a guilty party through the divorce court. You'd make her the talk of the whole scandal-loving country."

He flamed up. "It shan't touch her," he cried, "by God it shan't! I'd shoot the beast that insulted her as I'd shoot a dog. And I'll take her out of this, anywhere she wishes. The world's wide, and thank God I can afford to roam in it."

Pamela was touched, but she did not say so. "You speak like a fool," she said. "We don't live in the Middle Ages, Chris. Then you think you know women, but you know nothing of them. A woman like Cecily wants a home, and

her people mean more to her than she knows. You may be unconventional and indifferent, but she will not be, when the glamour has worn off. You can't drag her about the world for ever as your mistress, and to me it is quite conceivable that Hugh will refuse to divorce her. And then there's the child. For God's sake be sensible for once. It's an awful tragedy, but some tragedies have to be borne, and to attempt to mend them is to make matters worse."

Chris had never faced the practical tangible problem so nakedly as that. He was irresolute for a little, but just then a turn in the road brought them unexpectedly within sight of the camp. Four little tents stood in a line facing down the wide slope towards the west. At a distance blazed a fire, and the cook boys were already moving about it with pots and pans. The horses were going off in a herd to feed. Mallory was plainly to be seen directing the stacking of the saddles, and on a pile of rugs lay Gwen and Cecil at their ease. Eldred was handing them glasses and Hugh staggering up with more cushions. A glory of red and crimson stained the distant mountains, and the dark was swiftly falling. The slight figure on the rugs was watching the road, and as they came in sight she waved to them. Something suspiciously like tears gathered in Chris's eyes. He swallowed in his throat. "We'd better hurry," said Pamela, and put her pony to a canter.

Chris followed suit and there was little time for more, but, speaking rapidly, he replied to his cousin. "Pam," he said, "I'm glad you've spoken, but I'm not shaken. I love her too much. But I promise you this: first if I think she does not really, deeply, absolutely love me, I'll go; secondly, I'll say to her all that you've said to me before she is committed. I give you my word of honour. Will that do?"

Pamela sighed. "Don't ask me," she said. "But thanks, old boy."

"And you will be her friend whatever happens?" he urged.

She turned her grey eyes to him gravely. "I thought you knew me, Chris," she said.

Cecil called out to them as they rode up. "Come on you two. This is utterly too glorious, and we're drinking whisky. I never liked it before."

Grouped there on the rugs, tired but deliciously comfortable, the night fell on them. Camp stew, bread and jam, cake, coffee, chocolates, cigarettes, had never tasted as they did that night. The boys made another big fire near them, and the men yarned easily away of other camps and treks. Hugh and Mallory discussed routes bristling with strange names, and recalled to each other this and that incident, horses, dogs, game. Chris smoked his pipe more silently than usual, and though the others did not notice it, Cecil did. She asked for another cushion, and he brought it her, and then, at her silent invitation, settled himself down near. Under cover of the darkness and the talk, a little hand was slipped into his own with a warm pressure of tenderness. Poor Chris! He gripped it hard, and stared at—hell.

The girls insisted on sharing a tent, and that, slight as it was, cheered him. Moreover Cecil plainly had him much in mind. Once, just before bed time, they passed each other with an armful of rugs apiece, and she whispered: "What's the matter, darling?" But his: "Nothing, dear," did not satisfy her. He shared a tent with Mallory, but he could not sleep. At last he pulled the flap back that he might stare up at the stars, but there are times when the very stars are silent.

Gwen insisted on cooking the breakfast, and turned out magnificent omelettes. There did not seem a cloud in the sky as they discussed porridge and coffee, and Chris had to a certain extent recovered his spirits. The whole day was very much a repetition of the last, but when he was alone with Cecil, he watched her, weighed her words, questioned himself, as he had not done before. He and Pamela did not return to the subject. Cecil tried to press her as to her

conversation with Chris of the evening before, but she refused to be drawn and the girl did not dream of asking directly. Yet, although neither spoke of it, Cecil was to learn that day that Pamela knew. She was unusually tender to her for one thing, but that in itself might have but made her suspect. In the evening, however, she deliberately (and inwardly, afterwards, reproachfully) gave the lovers a chance together which they would not otherwise have had.

It came about in this way. The night's camp was in a cave, Moshebi's cave of Hugh's planning, which stood back from the track some hundreds of yards at the foot of a rocky kopje. Above it and behind, was a tiny native village, and to this the head man invited his distinguished visitors. Hugh and Mallory set off with him (it was perhaps fifteen minutes away), and the rest were following together when Pamela discovered that she had forgotten her camera and wanted, as there was still enough light, to take a snap-shot. Chris ran back for it, and she and Cecil returned slowly to meet him. He could not find it at once, and they reached the cave to discover him on his knees turning over the packs. Cecil sat down. "Oh," she said, "I am tired. I don't want to go to that beastly village now."

"Well, let's stop," said Pamela. "I can get my photo in the morning. Stop with her, Chris, will you? I'll just wave the others not to wait." And she turned deliberately, and walked away round a corner from which the others on the path were visible.

Chris moved to Cecil's side. "Pam knows," said Cecil with a little smile. He caught her hand. "She does," he said, "and she's a brick. She meant us obviously to have these few minutes together. Kiss me, darling, please. This day has been hard without one."

Cecil put her arms up and drew his head down to her. "It hasn't been possible, dearest, has it?" she murmured, "but it is wonderful seeing you all day. The very sight of you makes me glad. And strong," she added.

" 'The weak shall be strong,' " he quoted, smiling.

Cecil started. "Is this the cave?" she said. "Oh, Chris!"

"No, no, dearest," he said, "of course it isn't. Besides that's all rubbish. Only it's so true. I'm strong, but I'm very weak these days. I'm too weak to do what Pam asked me to do last night, though to-morrow I've got to talk to you about it. Oh how I love you, my dear dear Eve. If only you and I were really alone here, wouldn't it be wonderful, Cecily?"

"What did she say?" demanded Cecil.

But Pamela, from the rocks above, staring over the darkening lands, saw the party reappearing and turned, whistling, to the cave. There was no time for Chris to reply before she entered. Cecil retained his hand as she came in, and smiled boldly up at her. "You're rather a dear, Pam," she said.

Pamela chuckled. "I'm a fool," she said, "but you two are worse. Go and meet them, Chris."

The next day opened cheerlessly—it was cold and cloudy—and they had not been long in the saddle when a drizzle of rain began to fall. Even when it did not actually rain, a wet blanket of mist swept down on them and filled the hollows in the mountains through which they must ride. Everyone donned Burberrys or mackintoshes, and Hugh was anxious for Cecil lest she should catch cold. She, however, was anything but anxious for herself. The glow of exercise in her cheeks, she disdained his suggestions, and rode gaily on with each of the others in turn. It was Gwen who was chiefly bored by the gloom of the elements, for she said it was like an English day and a disgrace to South Africa. Mallory warned her that, up here, on the Border, they must expect it. He told gruesome stories of the Border mist completely enveloping parties for days together, and of packs tumbling over unseen precipices when forced to go on.

Lunch was eaten in a drizzle, and whereas one may ride gaily enough in company through rain, it is hard to be cheerful and eat in it. Mallory inwardly sympathised so much with Gwen, that, when they saddled up again, he suggested to Hugh that he should ride on ahead and get a small mar-

quee that had been ordered to be sent up from the police camp, pitched before the ladies arrived. Hugh agreed and said he would come with him, hurry up the packs, and get some hot tea ready for the girls. So the two men rode off together, and the rest followed at their own pace. The path was slippery and tortuous, and after a while they were disposed as follows: Eldred and a police sergeant in front, Gwen and Pamela, more packs, Cecil and Chris.

It seemed to him a heaven-sent opportunity. The girl beside him rode steadily on, with a serious face peeping out over her tightly buttoned coat and her hat pressed down on her ears. "Do you hate this rain awfully, Eve?" he queried.

She smiled at him. "I'm wet," she said, "and tired, and a bit cold, but I'm very happy—*now*. I don't want to see that marquee any too soon. We seem to have licence to ride together this afternoon."

Chris rode his pony quite close to hers. They were alone on the mountain path and blanketed in mist. He pushed his hand into her arm and she pressed it against her side.

"Dear," he said, "let's have a big talk. I promised Pamela yesterday that I would say something to you. May I?"

"First, what did Pam say to you?" she asked swiftly.

He evaded. "Has she said anything to you to-day?" he questioned her.

"She has," said Cecil, "but not much. She told me only one thing: to be sure this time that I spoke what I felt."

"I don't understand, darling," said Chris. "Can't you tell me?"

"Yes, dear, I can. I think I can speak to you of everything and anything, and I think somehow the time and the place fit in. I have never known anyone to whom I felt I could speak as freely as to you, Chris. It doesn't seem to matter what I say to you. I've absolutely no shame with you. Queer, isn't it?"

The man's heart beat fiercely. "Thank God you can say that, little girl," he said.

"Well, Chris, listen. When I came back from school in England where I'd been for six whole years, I was still just a child. I didn't understand anything about life at all. But I didn't know how ignorant I was, not even when things were pushed, so to speak, under my nose. Looking back now, I can see them one after another. First, there was a thing to do with Harold, my brother. While I was away (and of course I wasn't told) he got into trouble with one of our native servants. Gwen guessed and told me, and I was utterly horrified. Oh Chris, you've no idea how I felt it. It brought the ugliness of life before me. I couldn't conceive how Harold, my own brother Harold, could have thought of such a thing. And then Gwen told me one day that she could understand, and we talked, and she spoke about having a craving for love—yes, she, a child of sixteen. I did not guess half of it then, but of course she was in love with—with a man herself, and she was feeling that hot passionate love that cares nothing about law or decency or anything. Chris, do you understand?"

"Quite," he said. "Desire can burn in a man or a woman like fire in straw."

Cecil nodded. "Well, then, Hugh came. He was nice, kind, and awfully good to me, and he loved me. And I was an overgrown schoolgirl, and liked it. There was a day when Pam asked me if I loved him, and I asked her what love was and if—and then I quoted what Gwen had said to me—if that were love. And she thought that I felt that myself, and said that if it was so with me, I should marry Hugh. That's what she meant when she said that I was to speak now what I felt. Well, then, I did not feel *that* in the least for Hugh. The very idea of it horrified me. I thought it was beastly. I thought marrying him was a picnic sort of affair, and that we should be happy and jolly for ever up at Springfontein. So we married."

"And you've been unhappy, darling, ever since,—is that it?"

"Oh no, Chris, no, not a bit. It was dull, quiet perhaps,

but Hugh was very good to me—too good. Of course there was baby, and Hugh sometimes seemed to me almost like—well, like what I imagined Harold must have been. But it was only occasionally, and I supposed like a man. On the whole he was always—always——" And she hesitated for a word.

"Tame," said Chris gravely, but smiling a little despite it.

She glanced sharply at him, but saw that he did not joke. "That was just it," she went on, in a lower voice, "and as for me, I just slept. Just that. And then you came. . . ."

He pressed her arm, saying nothing, and in a while she resumed.

"First, I had only to see you to know that you meant something to me which no one else had ever meant. Oh Chris, what was it, I wonder?—but we've spoken of that. Each day I was drawn more and more to you—so swiftly too. Do you remember the library at Three Springs and how you read to me? Each thing fitted—the mist over life, the passing of old things, the waking to love. Then we met at Kokstad. I had really come in to find you, and for no other purpose, but when I saw you I would not have dared to speak if you had not seen me. Then you called. You always seemed to me to be at home, somehow, in my house. Hugh seemed like the visitor, and you, as if you belonged. Do you know when I really knew (though I didn't dare own it to myself) that I loved you? It was that night, after Mr. Gressly had been to dinner, when we said 'Good-night' on the stoep."

"Eve, Eve, my darling, fancy your remembering every little thing!"

"Oh I shall never forget, Chris dear. How could I? And then that afternoon in the drawing-room. That was the moment of all my life, Chris. I, too, knew I had a lover, and I, too, knew what it was to be burned up by fire."

They rode on a little way in silence. "And now," said Cecil at last, "I am sure I have spoken what I truly feel."

"And now?" echoed Chris.

"Now," said Cecil, "you know how I love you, and knowing that I love you, you will ride away and leave me to my fate."

"By God, I won't," cried Chris passionately. "You're mine, mine, Cecily! I defy fate. Besides it's a sham, a lie; we make our own fate. Little Eve, listen. We finish this trek—we must for the sake of appearances, and besides we've got to get down from here—and then I go straight to the coast. I must cable for money and make some arrangements, but then I'll book a cabin on a mail steamer for Australia. We will make a plan—easily enough, leave that to me—to give you a few days' unsuspected absence, and you will join me in Durban. The day we leave, we'll send a letter to Hugh. I'm awfully sorry for him, but we can't help ourselves. From Australia, we'll go on round the Islands, the lands of the sun and coral sands and sea breeze, of little pearly lagoons and long warm tropical nights, with the palms rustling overhead and the fire-flies dancing beneath them. We'll forget the world, and the world will soon forget us. Will you, Eve darling? Will you come with me to Paradise?"

"Oh Chris," she whispered, "my own Chris, it's too lovely to be possible."

"But it is possible," he persisted. "It waits for us. Do you mind leaving everyone for my sake, Cecily?"

She answered him slowly. "Father, no; Hugh, no; mother, no; friends, no; Ronnie, no—and yes, *yes,* Chris, I think," she said.

"What do you mean, darling? Bring him too. I count on that. There's no need to leave Ronnie, Cecily."

"Can't Hugh claim him by law, Chris?"

"They must find him, first, Cecil; then get him."

Cecil stared out into the mist. "Chris," she said, "that is the awful part of it all. Ronnie will grow up to be ashamed of his mother, perhaps; more likely, for I don't even think I could take him, without his mother. But what terrifies me is this: I don't really care. I love you as much

as that, Chris. He's my child, but he's Hugh's child. I know, now, that he's not the child of my real love, anyway. I don't feel a bit about him as mothers are supposed to feel, and I'd rather die than have another baby with Hugh, I think. But deep, deep down, I feel that I'm responsible for him. I gave him birth; how then can I leave him? In long years to come, how should I face God, Chris? And yet God is little to me by you now, and better to leave Ronnie than that he should grow up to hate me. Yes, better to leave him, I think, Chris."

"I think you are right about that, darling," said Christopher. "It's an amazing world, but there is only one fact in it that I can see clearly: I love you, and you love me, and nothing else matters. Isn't that it?"

"Yes," whispered Cecil. "And Chris—do you hate this, for I remember what you said?—I want *us* to have a son more than I can tell you. Chris, I suppose I ought to be ashamed to say it, but I'm not, and I feel I shall hardly live till I have you in my arms. And will you give me another baby, Chris?"

Chris reined up his horse and laid his hand on her bridle. He leaned out of the saddle and clasped her to him, kissing her passionately. "Cecily, Cecily," he whispered, "you make me believe again in God. I adore you and Him in you, my love, my life, and you shall be mine and I will be yours, soul and body, here and hereafter. Shall it be, Cecily, shall it be?"

"Yes," she whispered back, and clutched fiercely at his arm.

* * * * * * *

Out of the mist ahead, a voice sounded, crying her name. It was Pamela's. They disengaged hastily, and Cecil straightened her hat and dropped a little veil over her face.

"Yes?" shouted back Chris, enquiringly.

"Oh Chris, is that you? Is Cecily there? Ride on will you, quickly, the others are coming to meet us."

"Pamela's a jolly good sort of a cousin, isn't she, little

girl?" said Chris jokingly, and Cecil shot a smile at him from under her veil. They shook up their horses. As they rounded the corner, the mists ahead were seen to have cleared away beyond, for a wind was blowing up the valley, and the camp burst on their view. Cecil half reined up with a startled exclamation. "Chris!" she cried, "the Falls and the Pool!"

He nodded. A plain lay before them, and across it, with the hill side round which they had come running down steeply to it, was the Tselike. Perhaps half a mile away, the encircling mountains met again, and here, in a gap a good hundred feet in height, the river poured over into the plain. It fell into a great pool shut in by big boulders, and the roar of it came distinctly on their ears. It was the place named in their strange adventure sure enough, or one too like it for either to doubt.

Chris himself was aware of a strange sensation of dread, but he hastened to reassure the girl by his side. "Never mind, dearest," he said. "It's the place we shall remember with joy all our lives for it has finally given us to each other. You needn't be frightened now, need you?" But even as he spoke, he stared curiously at the camp, and his lips closed as if in some surprise.

There was, indeed, an unusual air about the already half-erected encampment set up on an open amphitheatre of rock above the great pool into which the Tselike thundered. The marquee was half up, but flapping in the wind, and the natives were standing in a group about it, looking up their way. Mallory was a little apart, talking to a black policeman who held a steaming horse by the bridle. And riding fast towards them were Hugh and Mr. Eldred. Chris's eyes were keen. He set his own horse in quicker motion at what he saw, and glanced sharply at Cecil. "Let me get ahead a little, darling," he said.

Of the two fast approaching, Hugh was leading, and Chris pushed out to meet him. His face was as white as a

sheet, and he did not seem to see Chris at all. "What is it, Sinclair?" demanded Chris, half blocking his way.

The other pushed by him without a word, and leapt from his horse. Chris heard Cecil cry: "Oh, Hugh, what's the matter?" and saw him reach up and put an arm about her waist. He half caught a muttered: "Oh my darling, my darling," but then Eldred was upon him. Cecil's father shot a glance at the husband and wife behind, and jumped from his own horse, passing his hand through his bridle. Chris leapt off by him, and the elder man took his arm heavily. Cecil, behind, suddenly burst into a wail, crying hysterically: "Oh God, oh God!" and Chris tried to swing himself round in a sudden agony. "No, Ashurst, no," said Mr. Eldred. "Best leave them alone. God help them both."

"But what is it?" cried Chris fiercely. "For Christ's sake, tell me."

"Ronnie's dead," said Eldred.

In a nightmare of helplessness, Chris rode into camp and walked over to the police messenger who had come with the news. Mallory turned to him and spoke in low tones. "He's travelled by relays," he explained. "They wired to the Nek. It seems the little chap was run over yesterday by a car in the main street of Kokstad. It's the most awful thing I've ever heard, I think."

Cecil, sobbing and clinging to Hugh, was led by him into a tent, and the rest drew apart. Gwen was weeping silently. Pamela was stony-eyed. In a few minutes Hugh came out, looking an old and broken man. He came up to Pamela and raised tired and dead eyes to her. "She wants you," he said. "Do you mind going?"

Pamela went straight to the tent without speaking, and silence fell on the little group outside. Then Mallory took control. "We must stay the night," he said authoritatively. "It's too late to start back, and useless, and besides she's not fit to ride. I'll send police by relays, and arrange for a car to come to Ramatseliso's. It's just possible to get one

up from Griqualand. You can leave early to-morrow, Sinclair." And he turned away to give directions at once.

Within the tent, Pamela found Cecil sitting on a pile of rugs with a set wild face. She was no longer weeping. "Pam, Pam," she cried as her friend came in, "God's punishing me! Pam, take me from this awful place—Pam, you must, you must!"

"There, there, dear," said Pamela, sitting down by her and throwing her arm around her neck. "You shall go, darling. Don't think of it now, dear. There's nothing unknown to fear now. What has happened, has happened, and, terrible as it is, it's not your fault."

"It is, it is," cried Cecil, "but oh, why did God let me marry? Why do I love Chris? Why did I ever see him? Oh save me from Chris, Pam, save me from Chris!"

A bewildered look crossed Pamela's face. For the life of her, she could not understand. "Don't you love him then, any more, Cecil?" she asked, almost sharply.

"Love him!" exclaimed Cecil wildly. "Don't you see that I love him far too much?—more than myself, more than my child, more than God!"

Pamela's face cleared. She bent over her friend with a great tenderness. "I see, darling," she whispered. "But we are not friends for nothing, little Cecily. Leave it to me."

PART III

THE MOTHER

CHAPTER I

CHRIS could not sleep for a long time—probably few of them did—but in the morning Mallory's entrance in a Burberry over his pyjamas did not wake him. Mallory, bent nearly double in the little tent, came over and touched his shoulder, collapsing into a sitting position as the other stirred and yawned sleepily. The moment he saw him, however, Chris was wide awake. "Hullo," he said, "how's things? What's the morning like?" And he sat up and groped for his cigarettes.

Mallory refused one, but produced a pipe from his pocket and lit it. "Look here," he said, "I've come to talk things over with you. Eldred's not much use, and Sinclair's still with his wife. (The night before, at Hugh's insistence, the tents had been re-arranged so that he and Cecil slept together. Cecil had scarcely appeared again publicly and if she had any objections now to this arrangement, she suppressed them, or made them only to her husband.) We'd much better have everything cut and dried before they appear."

Chris nodded. He was wondering whether the other man guessed anything. It was hard to say: Mallory's eyes were inscrutable. But since Pam's statement as to the obviousness of things to her, Chris had considered the possibility of others guessing a little. So now he said nothing. Mallory should have his say.

"You see," that cool voice of the other went on, "I take it the trek is off for us all. I sent off a man last night and told him to ride like hell, knock up Bartlow at Ramatseliso's and get a fresh horse, go on at once to Matatiele, and have a car sent up to the store by midday if possible. Sinclair

and his wife must leave immediately after breakfast, and I've got fresh horses for them from our police-camp near here. But one of us ought to go with them. I don't think Eldred is the man—he's a bit old and tired. Shall it be you or I? It's difficult for me to go all the way to Kokstad, though I could do it at a pinch."

"What about the rest?" questioned Chris.

"Well," said Mallory, "my idea is this. I take it none of 'em will have much heart for a long trek back. Therefore I suggest that at any rate Eldred and the girls ride down Bushman's Nek and catch the train at Underberg. If they leave this morning, they'll be in Underberg to-night, and to-morrow night in Kokstad. The train leaves about 8 a.m. to-morrow; change at Donnybrook. I can find an orderly to guide them to the head of the Pass, and they'd better take a boy with big saddle-bags and a few things for the night, and so on. He can bring back the horses."

"And this outfit?"

"The police can bring it all back to Qacha's Nek. It'll take them three or four days. They had better rest the packs here a bit, and start in a day or two."

Chris smoked thoughtfully. Then he nodded. "Yes," he said, "so far so good. It's the best plan, I think."

"Well, then, which of us shall ride with the Sinclairs?"

Chris glanced up at him. But Mallory was nursing his pipe in the grip of his left hand and pulling steadily. Chris could read nothing in his face, but he gathered from the other's tone that he considered the man in the blankets the obvious person. But he longed for a word with Cecil. Would she wish it? On the other hand, would she think it a kind of desertion if he left her? But how could Hugh and he accompany her to Springfontein?

"Chris," said a voice at his door.

He scrambled out of bed and reached for his waterproof. Struggling into it, he said in a low tone to Mallory: "Stay here a moment will you? That's Pam. I must just see what she wants."

Outside he found his cousin in a borrowed military overcoat, with its collar turned up and her hair hanging outside it glistening with moisture. The roar of the falls struck him as he emerged and he noticed that a heavy mist still lay around up the hill-sides. "Well?" he queried.

She pushed her arm through his and led him a little away from the row of tents.

"I was awake, Chris," she said, "and I saw Mr. Mallory pass our tent to go to you. Are you making plans?"

He outlined what Mallory had said.

"I see," she said. "Well, Mr. Mallory must go with them."

Chris hesitated. "How can I leave Cecily?" he questioned.

"Chris," said Pamela, "I know she would wish it. Will you take my word for it, dear? Besides, you cannot go with them. It would be torture to both of you. You had better not see her for some months. Honestly, it's not fair on her that you should. Let her get over this, and then—— Well, I don't know what you have decided between you, but you can re-open the matter then if both of you wish."

They walked to the edge of the Falls in silence, and stood staring up at them. "What the devil do you think that old witch meant on the Umtamvuna?" demanded Chris suddenly and irritably.

Pamela did not at once reply. She did not take her gaze from the falling water. Then she said: "How can I say, Chris? Perhaps I have a glimmering of an idea, but I don't know. Anyway you have to be strong now. And the strong thing is to trust Cecily to know her own heart and to leave Mallory to take them home."

Chris frowned moodily. "Let's go back," was all he said.

He dived into his tent and squatted on the valise. Mallory knocked out his pipe on a stone to one side of the tent. "Well?" he queried.

Chris did not attempt to evade. "I told her your plans,"

he said, "and she thinks it would be better if you went with the Sinclairs."

Mallory rose at once. He did not look at him. "Very good," he said. "I'll go and hurry up breakfast."

They were a forlorn party in the marquee. Hugh was unshaven, and even then Pamela could not help smiling to herself secretly. It was the first time she had seen him so. Cecil scarcely spoke and hardly raised her eyes to any of them. Gwen was still struggling with her tears. They were all dressed for riding.

An orderly put his head in at the door. "The horses are ready, sir," he said to Mallory.

They went out together. Hugh helped Cecil up and then turned to shake hands with Eldred. Chris walked up to Cecil and took her little gloved hand in his. It lingered a minute, but the others were too close for him to say much. "Goodbye," he said. "You know what I feel, don't you? God keep you."

She glanced at him then, her eyes wild and haunted, her face white and drawn. But she did not speak at all, and Chris stepped back as Gwen came up. Mallory was swinging into the saddle. "You can't miss the path," he said to Chris. "At the foot of the Pass there's a S.A.M.R. post where they'll give you tea. Off-saddle an hour there. You should be in Underberg by half-past three or four. Come up to the Nek when you can; my wife and I will be delighted to put you up." He shook hands warmly.

The husband and wife were already in motion, and the little group of four drew together to watch them. A hundred yards away, Hugh turned in the saddle and waved his hand, but Cecil did not look back. She sat hunched up on her horse, with bowed shoulders, a stricken little figure on a big police pony. Mallory had drawn ahead. And in ten minutes the mist swallowed them.

Then Gwen broke down again. She was next Chris and he turned to her, blind-eyed with his own tears, put his arm on her neck and led her away. "There, there, little

girl," he said. "Don't cry. Tears are little use in this world. We have all to go through with it, you know."

"I know," sobbed Gwen. "B-but I shall never forget Hugh's face. And to think what he's riding to all this awful day."

Chris said no more. It struck him that he had hardly thought of Hugh.

An hour later they themselves set out. The path, a rocky and tiny one, sloped up away from the tents, crossed the Tselike above the Falls, and wandered over a seemingly desolate plain, on which the rocks loomed up ghostly in the mist and still meres of water lay stagnant on the coarse grass. It was cold, and grew colder. Gwen and her father rode ahead after the police guide, Gwen still crying now and again silently, and Pamela and Chris followed with the boy behind them. They did not say much at first. Then a breeze got up, and after the mist had been driven this way and that for a bit, it suddenly lifted. Chris reined up his horse with an exclamation.

A wonderful sight stretched before and below them. It was apparent that they had been riding as it were on the edge of the world. The path ran between castles and kopjes of rock near the edge of a veritable precipice which fell into the Bushman's Pass. They were riding towards its head, plain to be seen between two peaks, and it ran down, ever widening, to a silver streak of river which grew and grew and passed out finally into the plain of Natal. Dwarfed trees and bushes appeared in increasing patches on the mountain-sides. Far below a streak or two of watery sunshine fell on mealie lands and the white roofs of a small settlement of houses.

Pamela pointed with her whip. "The S.A.M.R. post," she said.

Chris looked to the left, to the Basutoland side. The mist there was still swirling over the plain and filling the valleys, but the tumbled succession of peaks rose out of it, a but little known and romantic land. He sighed. "By

Jove, Pam," he said, "it's hard, despite all this, to turn one's back on that."

She looked towards the mountains as he had done at that, her strong face showing no trace of what she was planning already, but her eyes narrowing a little. He had given her a perfect opening, and she took it.

"Why should we?" she said calmly.

Chris started. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"Well," she said, "what can you and I do down there? We can do no good. Remember we're in Africa; we shan't even be in time for the funeral. Mr. Eldred and her sister will doubtless go to Kokstad, but if we go anywhere, it had better be to Durban and so home. But why should we go? There's no reason that I can see. Why should we not trek across Basutoland to the Free State? Then I can go home, and you can go on to Johannesburg as you want to do, and see the Transvaal."

"But the others?" queried Chris.

"We'll see them to Underberg and into the train. Then we can return. A day more or less makes no difference."

"But our trek things?" he persisted.

Pamela looked at him quizzically and laughed outright for the first time that day. "Really, Chris," she said, "you are an old duffer. Didn't Mr. Mallory say that the pack horses and their own must be rested a day at least and not leave till to-morrow? And isn't this orderly leaving us at the border in an hour or so? He can take a message. We could have our outfit and boys at this very place to-morrow night as easily as possible, and get back here from Underberg in time for tea. Or, better still, we could tell them to wait for us in the Bushman's cave, and we can arrive and camp there for the first night,—to-morrow or the day after, as you please."

The blood raced in Christopher's veins. "By Jove!" he exclaimed, "it would be perfect! You're great, Pam. But look here, could you and I clear off alone like that? What the devil would people say? There would be days and some

nights at least, I suppose, when we'd be far from any Europeans and alone up there."

Pamela hid a smile of triumph. "All right," she said resignedly. "I did not know you were so conventional, Chris. I thought this was the twentieth century, and you my cousin into the bargain. I've seemed to be grown-up so long, and father has so carefully encouraged me to think and act for myself like an intelligent human being, that I forgot you would still think of me as a town-bred miss, afraid of the world. Come on. Let's catch up the others." And she put her pony to a canter.

But that settled Chris, as she had meant it to do. He caught her up and apologised ruefully. "My dear Pam," was what he said, "I'm a fearful ass. For the Lord's sake, forgive me. Of course you're perfectly right. Do let's do it. We'll catch up, and I'll tell Eldred while you break the news to Gwen."

She gave him a shy smile. "That's better," she said, "but if you think you'll be bored with me, for heaven's sake say so."

Chris laughed gaily, but sobered at once. "You know I shan't," he said, "though I may be a bit dull at times. I can't forget this tragedy and Cecily, you know."

"I'm her friend, too," said Pamela quietly.

Chris drew Eldred ahead and told him their plan. "I see no reason why we should not go," he said finally. "We can do no good down there, and indeed, after all this, I feel I can't sit still in Griqualand."

Then Eldred expressed himself. "It's an utter impossibility," he burst out. "Forgive me for straight speaking, Ashurst,—I know in a way I've no right to speak to you—but I'm an older man than you are and I tell you it can't be done. Half the country will talk of it. You will ruin the girl's reputation. Why, as likely as not, you'll be a fortnight getting across and not meet half a dozen white people all the way!"

"All the more reason why we should go," said Chris curtly.

"There will be fewer fools to talk, and I expect folks up there will have sloughed off a little of this rotten conventionality. You seem to forget, Eldred, that Pamela's a grown woman and my cousin."

"Fiddle-sticks!" exclaimed the farmer angrily. "I don't care what you say. I know things have changed since I was in England, but, good God, you're a man and she's a woman and you can't go gadding about together as if you were man and wife! If you do, the world will say you're man and mistress ever after."

Christopher laughed easily, his anger evaporating. "Look here," he said, "I might be angry, but I won't be. I know you mean it all right. But I'll be as straight as you are. There are dirty-minded fools in the world who may speak as you say, but I don't think Pamela or I care a curse for them. I know I don't. And if she doesn't, I'm not going to try and persuade her to do so. Talk to her yourself if you want to, but you've settled me. If I ever had any hesitation, I haven't now. If she remains willing, I shall certainly go."

He pulled up his pony, and as the girls came up said coolly to Pamela, "Pam, Mr. Eldred is against it and wants to talk to you. Ride on with him, will you?"

She nodded and did so, and Chris dropped to Gwen's side. "Well, Gwen," he said, "what do you think of it?"

She raised a miserable face to him. "Oh," she said wearily, "I don't know. It's Pam's lookout, I think. Personally, I'd go, like a shot, if it were me, though I expect I shouldn't for my people's sake, if it came to the point. Only I've no wish to go now. I don't want ever to see Basutoland again. When I think of Cecil riding back now to—to——" And she broke down again.

Chris at her side, put his hand on her arm. "Gwen," he said gravely, "I think this is the first big sorrow that has come your way, isn't it? Well, little girl, when you're as old as I you may know more, but we live in a strange world, Gwen, God knows how strange. We're here for a flicker

of time, no more, and we cannot answer a single question of all the riddle about us. Death is not the least of those riddles, but it is certainly not, it seems to me, the greatest. After a while one comes to feel that it is perhaps a small thing, smaller than birth at any rate. People think surprisingly little about bringing a child into this world, and surprisingly much when God calls it out. To my mind, life is terrible, not death. I feel as sure that life persists as I feel that I live now, but the other side of death, life is in wiser hands than ours. Once some one we love passes over there, it is time to dry our tears."

"And here?" asked Gwen more quietly.

"Here?" queried Chris. "Well, here it is a queer muddle, but it's a great adventure. It's so great an adventure that most people do not truly dare it. Most of our rules and conventions have arisen because people are afraid of life, of experimenting, of adventuring out bravely. The world has tried to tuck us all up in cotton-wool. But that's a poor business and we get nowhere that way. Some of us are beginning to see it, I think, and that's why there is a revolt to-day against conventional things. We have dared to ask 'Why?' to half the prohibitions and behold there is no answer. Say 'Boo!' boldly, and half the shrieking horrors turn out to be babbling geese. In a way, death itself sheds its awfulness and its power to affright if you quietly face it. Pamela and I are both made that way, and that's why even a little thing like this trek seems simple to both of us. The world says: 'Oh you mustn't do it. It isn't proper!' and we say 'Why?' and there's no answer! Or at least there's no answer that cannot be settled with instantly if one is strong enough."

Gwen was silent. She was thinking of many things. And they rode up so to a gate in a thin fence of barbed wire which they had been following for some while. The orderly stood dismounted at it, and Pam and Mr. Eldred were already there.

Pamela turned to Chris, smiling amusedly. "I've had a

real lecture, Chris," she said, laying her hand on Mr. Eldred's arm, "and I know Mr. Eldred too well to mind what he says to me, or, on the other hand, to take no notice of it. So I've promised him something. When we get to Underberg I'll wire father—yes, Mr. Eldred shall see the telegram and agree that it is plain enough and honestly non-committal. He's staying in Durban, you know, and we can get an answer easily by to-morrow morning, possibly to-night. If he says it's all right and he doesn't mind, I'll go, but if not, I won't. Is that all right?"

"You must forgive an old-fashioned person, Ashurst," said Mr. Eldred before Chris could reply. "I've known this young lady a long time, and I feel I'm in some sort responsible for her up here. But if her father honestly has no objections, of course it's not for me to raise any."

Chris glanced from one to the other gravely, but Pamela's smile was infectious. "All right," he said, "but what about our orders to this fellow? He's to go back now. He can't wait for a telegram."

"Oh I've thought of that," said Pamela. "We'll tell him what we suggested before, but add this. If we don't get back to the cave by to-morrow night, or send a message, our boys are to turn round and go off after the others. They'll probably catch them up. Mr. Mallory told the police not to hurry the packs, and after all it's only a few hours from the Falls to here."

It was agreed so, and the police orderly got his instructions and a note in Sesuto from Pamela to her own boy whom she could trust. Then he turned back, and the four of them rode on alone. It was lovely descending the Pass, though very steep, and again and again they had to get off and lead the horses. The wind did not reach them after they had dropped the first five or six hundred feet, and the path wound in and out of rocks and scrub, crossing and re-crossing tiny brawling streams and skirting detached masses of cliff which must have fallen, in long ages past, from the grim mountains on either side. Under one such, Pamela

stopped and pointed up the strewn slope which led to its base. A black opening was plainly visible. "That's the Bushman's cave," she said; "shall we go up and have a look?"

Gwen gave a little shudder. (Pamela wondered what she would have done if she had known what Chris and she herself knew.) "Oh, no," she cried. "Isn't that your Anubis cave, Pam? I never even want to hear of it again."

Pam glanced at Chris. Her eyes queried 'To-morrow?' He smiled.

The sun shone on them right into the valley, but as they reached the river below, clouds came up and hid it. Chris glanced up at them. "We're in for rain," he said to Eldred. "Don't you think so?"

The farmer nodded. "Looks like it, but I hope not much. We've some way to go yet, and it will be awkward if it does, for these rivers come down so quickly."

They could ride easily now, and presently emerged into the plain at the foot of the Pass on which the police camp stood. At a canter they rode across the mile or two which still separated them from the house, the clouds gathering all the time. Thunder rolled up the Pass they had left, and big drops were falling as Chris led the way in between two whitewashed posts and up to a rondhavel with a notice above it to the effect that this was a station of the South African Mounted Rifles and Police. He knocked at the door, and a man in undress uniform came out. The rain was by this time falling fairly heavily, and the girls were tugging out mackintoshes from rolls and saddle-bags. The white police sergeant shouted for boys who ran up and took their horses to the stables, and himself led the way to his house. His wife was nursing a baby in the front room, but she disappeared with it as they entered and returned in a moment to welcome them. As they sat down, the rain began to fall in rods on the iron roof and it was no easy matter to talk.

"It can't last long like this," shouted the constable to Mr. Eldred above the noise. "Wait an hour or so and have some tea. I expect when you've had a cup or two it will be over."

"What about the rivers?" Eldred shouted back.

"Oh, nothing to worry about. You only cross two and both high up not far from here. There's a bridge over the Umzimkulu and you don't reach it until you're close by Underberg."

But the rain did not cease. After a while, however, it did not fall quite so heavily, and they sat and chatted while the man told them of his lonely service up there, and of the tricks of the native and occasional white liquor runners who made a profitable job of smuggling a few bottles at a time of execrable brandy across the border into the Protectorate. According to him, he could not stir out without notice being given by sentinels on the watch, and although his very presence did something to hinder the trade, captures were few and far between. He had made one, though, the week before. Pretending to set out for a farm in one direction, he had turned on his tracks under cover of night and surprised a convoy on the very edge of the border up towards the Sani Pass. He had collared seventeen bottles of the stuff and a revolver, he said, by which evidence he hoped to lay hands on a local native sub-chief suspected of the traffic.

But still it rained. It was pleasant enough to sit there dry, chatting and drinking the hot tea, but if they were to get to the railway that night, they must go, rain or no rain. Eldred and Chris took many journeys into the open to look at the sky, and finally, in a drizzle, they started.

The ground was very wet and slippery, the grass and bush waist high, and the path narrow. Little streams were now biggish yellow rivers, and the crossing of them no easy job. The horses slipped about on the hidden stones, and one could only sit tight and hope for the best. The rain came on, worse than ever. They were soon wet beneath their waterproofs, and all attempt to make light of things ceased among them. To Gwen, the ride fast became a nightmare. Chris rode thinking all the time of the distant Cecil and how she was faring in this. Pamela alone seemed fairly indifferent, leading the way half the time and making all speed where she

could, her face streaming with wet but her cheeks shining with health.

They were now completely out of the Pass and on the flat veld. The mountains stretched behind them, black with rainstorms and stabbed with lightning. The path itself was entirely flooded and at times it was not possible to see the way at all. Soon they were riding through several inches of water over flooded country, Pam still a few yards ahead, the other three together behind, with Chris a bit in advance on Gwen's right. He had just remarked to Eldred that Pamela seemed much more sure of the road than he was, and he was in the act of calling to her to take care, when the thing happened. She gave a sharp exclamation and appeared to try to rein back her horse, who stood a moment, slithered, shrieked as a horse will in sudden peril, and then, with its rider, plunged forward into a deep hidden pool and literally disappeared.

Chris was off in a second and floundering on foot to the place where, a moment before, his cousin had been. He heard Gwen gasp behind him and Eldred shout: "Take care. You'll be in too!" Then Pamela reappeared, white, her hat gone, cumbered and struggling in her wet riding cloak, her horse swimming beside her.

"Mind his hoofs!" cried Eldred in an agony behind him, but Chris did not stay to think. He was in, and the thick turbid waters were over his head. There was thunder in his ears, and a wall of yellow liquid about him for what seemed an age, and then he emerged, swimming strongly and making for the figure of the girl who was half under water, with her cloak burgeoning out over her from the air imprisoned beneath. He glanced at her horse. The beast was climbing out with difficulty in the sticky mud, and the current had carried his rider and Chris past him already. There was no danger there at any rate. And now he had reached Pamela and was fighting with the folds of the cloak. Under again for a moment, the water half choking him; then up—"Keep still a moment," he gasped—"hands back," and he

tore at the cloak. The girl was trying to stand, but the bottom was too muddy. Perfectly cool, she held her arms up and back to give him the help with her cloak that he needed, and disappeared afresh. He wrenched off the mackintosh with an effort, and went down again after her.

It seemed an eternity before they were out. Eldred, on the other bank, could give no help; he was already some hundreds of yards down looking for a crossing; and Gwen had hidden her face in her hands. One arm round Pamela's waist, Chris fought with the other to gain a grip on grass and bushes. And at last it was done. Nearly exhausted, he half fell, half staggered forward on the soaked grass, gasping for breath.

Pamela lay still beneath him. He sat up, and turned her over. She had fainted. She was wearing a shirt and a tie which had tightened about her throat, and with clumsy fingers he loosened it, opening the shirt. Then, with dim remembrances of first-aid lessons, his fingers groped on her breast, and then, with his hand on her heart, his senses reeled for a moment. The next thing he knew clearly was the sting of brandy on his lips and Pamela's own voice calling his name.

He smiled and struggled into a sitting position. "Oh, all right," he said faintly.

She peered into his face, and his gaze travelled up her loosened disordered dress, her white throat, her face, and stayed on her eyes. He had never quite realised before what eyes Pamela had. He looked stupidly into them for what seemed like minutes. "Oh, all right," he said again dully.

"Did the horse kick you?" asked Eldred anxiously.

"No, I don't think so," said Chris, still half dazed.

Pamela smiled. She was fast recovering. "You'd know if he had," she said. "See if you can get up, Chris. We can't stay here."

He got to his feet. They looked a comical group in the still falling rain, Pamela with her hair streaming and her clothes still disordered; Eldred holding the brandy flask and

bare-headed; Gwen, who had now crossed where her father had discovered a passage and had pluckily collected the horses, white-faced still, and trembling. His mind cleared, and he burst out laughing, in which Pamela joined him, buttoning up her shirt.

"What a fool I was," he said. "But I'm all right now. Jove, that was a flounder, Pam! Where's your mac.?"

"There," said Eldred, pointing to it, stranded a little way downstream. "I'll get it." He walked towards it.

"Are you all right, Pam?" asked Gwen, anxiously.

"Quite," she said. "Thank God it's not over cold. But we must ride to keep warm. Can you manage it, Chris?"

"Oh rather," he said, himself again and a bit ashamed of his momentary weakness, "if you can, that is. There's a farm over there. Shall we go to it?"

"And cross this stream again?" laughed Pamela. "What do you say, Gwen?"

"Oh I daren't," said the girl. "Let's get on: we are sure to pass another soon."

It was Chris who helped Pamela to mount, and in the saddle she leaned over and clasped his hand. Her touch recalled to Chris how a few seconds ago, his fingers had lain on her breast, and the colour mounted slightly to his face. She did not heed it. Bending over a little, she looked steadily at him. "Thanks, Chris," she said. "You saved my life, my dear, and I shan't forget it."

At the moment he could find nothing to say. He was unlike himself. He could only think suddenly that she was not quite the Pamela he had known before. And there shot through his brain the quick remembrance that for the next fortnight they would be alone together.

"It was nothing," he said, "and you'll have time to thank me in the next few weeks."

She chuckled, and in so doing seemed to him at once her old self again. "What about the telegram?" she said. "Probably father will forbid it."

Her laugh belied her words, but Chris began to realise that

he would be enormously disappointed if it turned out so.

Hour after hour they rôde on. Not long after their mishap, the rain ceased, but no sun came out and the roads were very wet. The horses seemed determined not to travel quickly, and were in any case fairly tired with the previous trekking, for of course they had had no day's rest, and conversation died down among the party. Eldred kept glancing nervously at Gwen, who seemed to feel the cold and damp the most. But the wind was drying their outer garments fairly well. Pamela, despite her immersion, seemed fit enough, and neither of the men thought of themselves. The day began to die, and in the dusk they saw at last the lights of Underberg. It is a railway terminus and a vastly important place in that part of the world, but it can boast only a railway station and two cottages for officials, and a hotel combining bar, farm, store, and Post Office, some half dozen fields away. Thither the tired party made their way, and dismounted in the road before the lights of the bar.

"Now," said Chris, "drinks first. Yes, for all of us. The boy can take the horses, and meantime we get alcohol into us at once."

They invaded the bar and found a pleasant motherly woman in charge. Hot toddies brought colour to Gwen's cheeks and loosened their tongues. "What about clothes?" demanded Eldred. "I think you ought both to go to bed."

"Oh, father, no," cried Gwen. "We've more or less of a change in the saddle-bags, and my skirt is dry now anyway. We can manage, especially if we can get our wet things dried at a fire for to-morrow. It would be beastly to go to bed. What do you say, Pam?"

"I agree," said Pamela. "Tell you what, we'll put on our dry pyjamas next our skin and the next dryest things on them. I've got a blouse and skirt in the bags, too. Besides I've a telegram to send, and I shall wait up for an answer."

Eldred flushed a little. He began rather to wish he had said nothing, but they must needs all troop off to the Tele-

graph Office which was part of the little general store. Here Pamela composed a telegram, with much pencil-sucking to assist her, and finally read it in triumph to the rest of them. "Although others return do you mind Chris and I trekking Free State together.—P.," she had written. Eldred agreed that it would do, and they moved off to their quarters. Two rondhavels standing by themselves at the end of the garden had been given up to them, and here, with much merriment, they changed. Chris had a pair of slacks and a shirt, but was forced to retain his jacket; Eldred found his riding breeches fairly dry and had another coat; and finally the girls emerged in a mixture of raiment. They invaded the little dining-room and toasted themselves at a fire. There was no one there at first, but presently Mr. Saulson put in his appearance and was introduced to them.

Saulson was a character. He was over seventy, white-haired and shabby, and he wore, except when actually sitting with ladies, a real old-fashioned Boer hat such as you rarely see these days. He had been a seaman, miner, waiter, beach-comber, policeman, journalist, school-master, Free Church minister and finally miner again. Indeed he had been miner in between whiles as well. He had prospected for gold in Australia, the Yukon and South Africa, but he had never found it. Just now he was convinced that there were valuable minerals in the Drakensberg. He had been so convinced for a couple of years or more, and he was waiting in Underberg for someone to roll up who could also be convinced and find the capital. It seemed a forlorn hope, but he waited. The good hostess of the hotel permitted him to stay, and pocketed irregular allowances which occasionally drifted out from home. In a word, he was seventy and finished, but the kindliness of the country recognised and tolerated him, instead of, as in older lands, recognising and kicking him out. As a matter of fact, Natural History was his hobby. He could speak of trees from the cedar that is in Lebanon (which he also had visited) unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall, and he could discourse of beasts and of fowls and of

creeping things and of fishes. In Chris he found a ready listener, and after a while, as he thought, a possible financier. He is of no importance, except that he somehow lent Underberg a character in the eyes of the party. Years afterwards Gwen could see it all again: Pamela sitting by the fire nursing her knees and gazing into the flames; her father smoking his pipe amusedly in an armchair; herself at full length in a steamer-chair right in front of the blaze; Chris by her side and leaning back against her, lighting cigarette from cigarette and listening chaffingly with occasional questions; and Saulson, who had resumed his hat for reasons of his own, bolt upright in the corner of the fireplace opposite Pam, talking earnestly and striking his right hand into the palm of his left from time to time. The firelight flickered on the ceiling-board walls and bare wooden floor, and on the iron roof the rain had begun to beat again.

Probably she dozed. Her mind went back to the parting of the morning, and at the remembrance she caught her breath with a little stab of pain. She seemed to see Cecil's bent slight form riding away in the grey mist with the two men beside her. It looked horribly, she thought, as if she were a prisoner riding to some awful fate. And then she pictured the trail up which they had all come together the day before, and imagined that little figure riding as swiftly as might be back and back and back. Then she thought she saw Ronnie—and here no doubt she was asleep—Ronnie starting to cross a sunlit road, just toddling. His nurse gossiped with a black boy by the side and took no heed. Gwen wanted to shout and could not, and suddenly round the corner came the motor, nearer, nearer, louder, louder—Crash! She awoke with a little cry of horror.

Chris turned to look at her. "You've been asleep," he said. "It's only the girl bringing the telegram I expect."

Old Saulson had gone to the door for it as being the nearest, and he handed the flimsy envelope to Pamela. She tore it open, and laughed her chuckling laugh. Then she glanced swiftly at Chris and turned to Mr. Eldred. "It's

rather characteristic of father," she said. "Listen: 'Genesis xlv. 24. "See that ye fall not out by the way." Urfurd.' Does that satisfy you, Mr. Eldred?"

He sighed and got to his feet. But he was man enough to take his defeat in good part. "I suppose so," he said. "But we shall none of us so much as get into the way unless we go to bed. Gwen's asleep already, or was, and we're all pretty tired."

They lit the girls to their rondhavel, and lingered a moment at their own door. There was a fitful moon and the rain was again clearing. "I think we've had the worst of it, Ashurst," he said. "Poor, poor little Cecil, I wonder where she is. God comfort her to-night."

Chris was not a religious man, but he recognised that the other's saying was more than a conventional commonplace, and he answered it solemnly. "Amen," he said.

CHAPTER II

THE train swung round the bend and, at the turn, Gwen leant out and waved her hand. Next minute it was out of sight, and Pamela and Chris turned simultaneously to one another. He smiled and she chuckled. The station-master, wearing a heavy overcoat for it was quite cold thus early, trudged past them, and the car that had come in with passengers from Himeville snorted off. The two walked away together.

"What were you thinking of then?" asked Chris as they left the little station.

"Can't you guess?"

"No."

Pamela shrugged her shoulders with an air of comic resignation. "Well, I suppose I really didn't matter to you then in the least, cousin Chris. Or perhaps you've been to so many places and seen so many people since, that you've forgotten. No, I won't flatter myself; I think it is the first. But you mattered a good deal to me that day."

He still looked puzzled. "What day, Pamela?"

"I was—what? goodness knows!—thirteen or fourteen I suppose, and father and I were staying with you and your people in Devonshire. One morning early our respective fathers went to town and I was left for a whole day in your care. That morning there was nobody on the station when the train had left but old Jeremy the porter and we two. Remember now? This recalled that."

He flushed a little and glanced at her half curiously. "You are a queer girl, Pam," he said. "Why do you remind me of that now?"

She chuckled again. "You still don't remember," she

said. "Do not you recall how you abused your trust? You kissed me, Chris, that day—for the first and last time I vowed then when I discovered you meant nothing by it. Of course those dears don't know it, but that's really why it is possible for me to trek with you for a week or more across Basutoland, accompanied, chaperoned and otherwise protected only by two natives."

Chris laughed easily, but his cousin detected the incipient frown that puckered his forehead ever so slightly. She knew well enough that she had already struck a little spark which might, she thought, if she wished, flame into a fire. Chris felt somehow that her reminder of that absurd incident of long ago was by way of a slight to him. He had not found that women generally refused his kisses; in fact, had any other? Not that he wanted to kiss Pamela; he had done with all that for Cecily's sake; but his conceit did not like the situation. He should have been the one to refuse, not Pamela. And yet Pamela had as good as told him that it was because he was and could be only a good companion that she had ventured on this trek. Being Chris, he naturally frowned—ever so slightly of course. But he wished to see his virtue, not hers, come triumphant from the situation.

Pamela need not have been the least anxious lest he should see through her subtlety. She was far too deep for him. The game she had set herself to play for Cecily's sake had been well started, and his slight frown augured well for its success.

So, a couple of hours later, they set off on their return to the Berg. The sky was grey and sullen, but it was not actually raining, and the boy with the spare horses rode in front. Pamela was by far the more gay of the two, for the thought of Cecil travelled every foot of the way with Chris. She saw soon enough what lay uppermost in his mind and did not hesitate to speak of it. They were breasting a hill together at foot pace when she asked abruptly:

"Did you have that talk with Cecil which you promised me, Chris?"

He nodded, but did not speak.

"And the result?"

There was no reply for a few minutes, but Pamela waited expectantly. Then Chris raised his head and looked at her, and their eyes met steadily. "Pam," he said, "I think I can trust you—indeed I know I can. Cecil had but just promised to come away with me when Sinclair and Eldred rode up to her with that ghastly news."

"I guessed so," said Pamela.

"Why?"

"Oh from a few words that Cecil said to me in the tent when I went in to her."

"What did she say?" he demanded.

Pamela settled herself in the saddle, having reached the top of the rise. "Nothing much," she said. "You can surely guess that the poor child was far too upset to talk coherently about anything."

"By God, yes," said Chris, a trifle hoarsely. "You were right, Pam. I couldn't have ridden back with them to Ramatseliso's. I should have had her in my arms before the end despite Hugh, and God knows what would have happened then. You've no idea how much I love her."

Pamela glanced at him curiously. "Well, Chris," she said, "and how do you think this affects your plans?"

"It doesn't affect them at all," he said quickly, "or at least it only delays them. You know well enough that I mean the little chap no harm and that I don't really speak callously, but if anything, Ronnie's death just clears the road. Nothing remains but the solid fact that that marriage was not made in heaven. They are utterly unsuited to each other, and Cecil went into it too young to know her own mind. She knows it now, thank God; I believe she loves me with her whole heart. And I love her, Pam—you've no idea how I love her—and when a necessary few months have gone by, I shall go up again and claim her. How I shall manage to wait that time, I don't know, but this I know: Cecily and I

are pledged to each other and nothing shall come between us."

The girl did not attempt to contradict him, and no trace of her thoughts appeared on her face. A couple of big locust birds, feeding on the veld, rose heavily at their approach and flapped across the path ahead of them. She watched them idly. When they had settled again, she spoke.

"So you are quite sure it will make no difference?"

"Quite," he said emphatically, "why should it?"

"Why indeed?" said Pamela, and lapsed into silence again.

"If only I could have got a word with her at parting!" burst out Chris suddenly. "Pam, I hope to God I don't have to go through another twenty-four hours like that! To see her ride away, utterly stricken with sorrow, and at parting not to be able to say a word! But she'll write. Does Hugh see all her letters?"

"I think so. Till you came, she was far too unsophisticated to have any other arrangement with her husband."

Chris digested this in silence. Then: "But you could send a message for me? Possibly he would not want to see your letter."

"What do you want me to say?"

"Only that I hope with all my heart that she will write to me. You could say, in case he sees, that I was very cut up, and that you know how much I should like a word. She'll understand. I'll write to Hugh myself, of course, as soon as I can—a friendly letter of sympathy, I mean. But I can't write such a letter to her. Will you?"

"Yes," said Pamela, "but I shouldn't expect her to say much, if I were you. She's a poor correspondent."

Silence again for a while. Both were busy with their thoughts. Then, on a level, they broke into an easy canter side by side, and Chris said:

"Look here, Pam, what do you think of all this yourself? Now, I mean. Do you think I'm a beast and a cad?"

"Good Lord, no," she replied quickly. "I'm no conventional saint, Chris, and certain aspects of the case, touching Hugh, I know you regret as much as possible. But there they are, and you can't help them. Of course Ronnie's death is a horrible tragedy, especially at a moment like that, but naturally neither you nor she were in the very least responsible. That goes without saying. And I think very little of that marriage either, although . . ." And she hesitated.

"Yes?" he queried.

"Well, it's useless talking to you of Cecil. You've your own ideas and you're very much in love with her. But if Cecil is not cut out for Hugh, I tell you honestly, Chris, I'm not so sure she is cut out for you either. You can overtalk her and persuade her, and you've thrown a glamour over her. But you're late in the day, and Cecil is fundamentally a woman. Your ideas of women and hers are not the same. You're a modern; she's as old as the hills, child as she is. You're not dealing with a modern girl, or a woman emancipated. . . ."

"Thank God for that!" broke in Chris quickly.

Pamela laughed heartily. "Chris," she said, "you're an amazing person. If you were not at this moment very much in love, you'd see the absurdity of yourself! That's honest. Here are you, breaking in on Cecil with all your modern ideas on marriage and morality, and yet you thank God that Cecil is not emancipated! Why, you've been down on your knees to her for days, begging her to emancipate herself!"

Chris looked a little foolish. But he rallied stoutly. "Oh well," he said, "I didn't mean that sort of emancipation. I thought you referred to the kind of female one meets in town these days who is as cool as a cucumber with men and apparently has no primitive instincts left."

"Well," replied Pamela, "you can't have it all ways, my dear. I take it you want Cecil to emancipate herself from what you would call civilised conventions and get back to primitive

instincts. You say she has promised a course of action which is to all intents and purposes to do so. Good, but are you quite so sure that you know what primitive instincts in a woman are? You're mighty clever if you do! There's a damn lot of talk these days about primitive instincts, and, so far as I can see, precious little understanding of them." And Pamela's hands tightened involuntarily on her rein, so that her pony tossed his head and had a little to say on primitive instincts himself.

When he was quietened, Chris rode up alongside again. "What do you know about them, anyway?" he queried quizzically.

But Pamela had recovered herself. "Enough to know that there is a great deal I do not know," she said with her chuckle. "Enough not to worry much about them, anyway. People who possess them must work the problem out. They're bigger than we are, Chris, but woman's instincts are queer things. There was Nanea's husband, for example."

"I didn't know she had one," said Chris.

"Nor she has, now. He died of the influenza, unwept and unsung. He was about as old as Sekeke, her father, and she did not care a mealie stalk for him. She loved Ungugu instead. So one dark night, Ungugu crept into her hut and struck a knife into her husband before the law which he thought (and she thought) finished him, only he was a tough old thing, and, besides that, destined for the flu. But what do you suppose Nanea does? Reap the fruit of his labour in peace? Not at all. She threw herself into the arms of Ungugu and while he was kissing her stuck a second knife into *his* ribs. He wasn't so tough as the other, and besides he was not destined for the flu. Then she went out and called her father."

The ghost of Nanea's lover would probably have thought that Chris laughed heartlessly. "But you don't suppose Cecily will dig me in the ribs?" he demanded. "Besides, why in the world did Nanea do it?"

Pamela smiled. "No," she said, "I don't. And I don't

know why Nanea did it either. Primitive instincts of a wife, I suppose. Unless it was a little game of Haketsebe's."

Chris shifted his reins into his other hand and felt for his tobacco pouch. Then he sighed. "Well, Pam," he said, "let's change the subject. I'm glad we've had this talk, and I'm very grateful, dear, that you are Cecily's friend and on our side. One thing I know. I shall go and fetch Cecil in a few months' time with a couple of steamer tickets in my pocket. She'll not refuse me then. I know she won't. And then for Paradise."

"I thought the gates were guarded," said Pamela drily.

"Yes, to that ancient place. But we shall make our own, and a better."

"Sure Cecil will think it better?"

"By God, she will," swore Chris earnestly.

Pamela said nothing.

The little stream that had been a torrent twelve hours before and had threatened to bar Chris out of his new Paradise as effectively as the flaming sword of the old, was now no more than a stream again. They crossed it easily, and on the far side had lunch—the remains of a cold chicken from the hotel, some excellent cheese and a flask of whisky.

Pamela regarded the brook before her meditatively. "That was a near enough thing, Chris," she said. "I remember your reaching me, and that you wrenched off my mac., but not much else. The next thing I knew was the taste of brandy and the sight of your face looking pretty ghastly. Now if you had not come in for me, I wonder where I should have been by this time?"

Chris threw a chicken bone into the water. "Where time is no more. Making daisy chains in heaven," he said lightly.

She smiled, but did not take up his jest. "It seems to me such an adventure that I'm almost sorry I did not undertake it," she said.

Chris dropped his banter. "I know," he said, "I've felt that same myself. If I don't just now, it's for obvious reasons. I want to live a few months more and live them

quickly, and besides it's only due to you to say that, that apart, I can hardly imagine anything better than this little jaunt of ours. You're a rattling good pal, Pamela."

She turned her head deliberately towards him, and it dawned on him again, suddenly, what a desirable person she was. Her narrowed eyes smiled into his. There was something in her face and particularly in those eyes that made him want to kiss her. He put the idea instantly from him as he would never have done a couple of weeks before, but the thought had been there, and in that moment, while the water murmured in the reeds and the wind sang softly across the veld, their wills met for the first time of the many to follow in the days that were coming. It was scarcely more than the salute of fencers, and Chris did not trouble himself to enquire why he should have felt a crossing of the swords at all; but it was there. Pamela, probably, did not in the least expect him to kiss her, and therefore she had no sense of defeat, but she knew well enough that he had thought of it at her look. That was enough. She replied to his compliment. "Thanks," she said.

Chris leant on his arm, regarding her. His eyes travelled covertly down her figure, and his senses stirred a little. "Yes," he said again, "I'm jolly grateful I fished you out. You're too good to lose, my dear. I wouldn't have missed this business for anything."

She chuckled. "Oh that's why you are glad you fished me out, is it?" she said. "That's a back-handed sort of compliment, Chris. But tell me, you rebel against most of the accepted beliefs and practices, where do you suppose I should have gone?"

He shifted his look to the flowing water. "Frankly," he said, "I haven't the least idea. That you—your real self—would have gone somewhere, I don't doubt for a moment. The extinction of life seems to me utterly inconceivable. I find no difficulty in believing in the immortality of the soul, indeed my difficulty lies in thinking that the smallest insect that creeps or flies is not immortal. Of course what I

question in their case is the consciousness of life, and if theirs is a life that has never been conscious of a distinct existence at all, as seems possible, maybe it will simply pass back, so to speak, to the reservoir of life, whatever that may be, like a drop of water that sparkles a moment in the sun and falls back into the sea."

"Wherefore?" she queried.

"Well, therefore, we at any rate go on living. Where, I don't know. How, I don't know. Why, I don't know. Personally I am inclined to think that down here we simply cannot know those things. Just as a fish, even if endowed with reason, could hardly conceive of our life, so I think we cannot conceive of our own life hereafter. It will be of another order of things. That's all there is to it."

Pamela reached for another cheese sandwich. "I know what you mean," she said. "I read a novel the other day which imagined life in Arcturus. It was jolly clever, but towards the end your brain fairly went on strike. There was so much in Arcturus totally unlike the things of Earth that the author had to invent new names and phrases to describe them. But it conveyed nothing to me. There were new colours, but to be told that 'jale' bears the same relation to blue as red does to green fails to give me any idea as to jale."

Chris nodded. "And St. John, being wiser than your author, said there was gold in Heaven because it would have been quite useless to call it jale."

"I regret the loss of the streets of gold," said Pamela.

Chris laughed. "Cheer up," he said. "Gold's only a certain combination of positive and negative electrons, and who can say that electrons will not be in Heaven!"

"Pass me that flask of whisky," said Pamela. "It's my turn. Thanks. Chris, what about Spiritualism?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "It's beyond me," he replied. "A lot of fraud and a substratum of truth, I think. But most of the jargon is impossible. I should insult my friends

to think that their spirits would think or act as those fellows say."

Pamela was silent. At last she looked up. "So that's all?" she queried.

"What else is there?" retorted Christopher.

"Nothing in life has taught you to say more?" she persisted.

"No," he said, plainly a little bewildered.

"Let's get on, then," said Pamela, abruptly.

It was a curious business, this work of retracing their footsteps without the others, and curious, too, how different the aspect of everything was to-day. Yesterday the Range had lain behind and had been shrouded in rain-clouds; to-day, though sullen and unrelieved by sun, it lay ahead, and hour by hour they drew nearer to it. Their spirits rose distinctly with the miles. Pamela was happiest on mountains, and the wilder they were, the better she liked them; Chris, too, albeit he by no means despised the advantages of civilisation, liked, as he had once put it, to sleep some months in the year under the stars. The Drakensberg were, moreover, a new experience to them both, and, unlike last week, they would have fewer servants about them and be more on their own. Thus, near the police station, when Chris reined up and suggested a call, Pamela vetoed it heartily. "There's no sign of life," she said, "and I expect he's out."

"But his wife will be in," objected Chris, "and it seems decent to call."

"Hullo!" cried Pamela. "The man of conventions again, eh? Let's call by all means."

That, of course, settled it, and they rode on. The gloomy day was gloomier in the Pass, and Pamela, after glancing again and again at her companion, burst out into a laugh.

"What is it now?" demanded Chris, amused.

"Oh, my dear," gasped Pamela, "this *is* rather priceless you know. Here are you and I riding together into the unknown. Red-hot from caves and ghosts, we are now

riding up a gloomy Pass to sleep in a ghost cave and venture forth into these mountains to seek fate. If our boys knew what we know—or at least what I know—do you suppose that they would come? Not a bit of it. They'd think I was a witch and you a devil."

"Probably they'd be right in the identifications, to some extent," said Chris smiling. "But what do you know especially?"

"Well," replied Pamela, "you remember Auntie Tot, don't you? She has her stories of this Pass." And she related to him the old servant's history as far as she knew it. She narrated well. Something of the pitiful mystery of it all fell on Chris.

"It's a ghastly old world," he said. "Think of those days, eh? Think of that armed gang travelling through the night, possibly to this very cave, and then the red cold massacre, and the ride back in the morning with the naked captive children crying for fear and being silenced with blows."

"Yes," said Pamela, "and think of what these old mountains have seen besides that. What primitive races, do you suppose, lived here when the world was young? Who knows what monsters used this valley as their lair? Think of those Bushmen coming from God knows where, blotting out the poor creatures called human to whom even they were a higher type, and then taking possession to live their day and go the way of the rest in the end thereof. And all the time those old heights have looked on immovable, and if a crag now and again toppled crashing into the valley, it was not to punish a murder or to answer a prayer. But see, there's Philip. Our crowd are here all right then. We must dismount here. Philip'll take the horses."

They got off and commenced to climb up to the cave above. The hill-side was steep and broken and it was no easy task, save that bushes and scrub gave some help by lending a grip here and there. There was no path to speak

of, and sugar-bush and dwarfed trees grew right up to the cave itself. Some fifty feet below it, they did however stumble on a tiny trail made by herd boys for their goats, and this they followed, winding in and out, until a turn showed them the cave's mouth ahead and slightly lower than the level at which they now stood. There was a fire already burning in the entrance, and the Urfurds' other boy, with the native who had gone on ahead of them with the Eldreds' horses, was squatting before it.

The two natives got up when they saw them. Pamela asked after the other horses, and she was told that they were pasturing in a fold of the hill behind the kopje of which the actual cave was a part. She and Chris entered and looked curiously around. The place was not unlike Pamela's own cave on the Umtamvuna, that is to say it was more a great sloping hollow, with a wide mouth which rapidly narrowed and did not extend far back, than what is called a cave in England. The ground, however, did not slope from the mouth as did Pamela's, but stretched smooth and soft and level to the rocky wall where smaller hollows made door-less chambers in the gloom. They entered, and Chris got a candle out of a pack-saddle to allow of a detailed examination. Its flickering light fell on the rough walls and scared a flight of bats far overhead. But it showed clearly enough, at the back of the larger of the interior rooms, a great surface liberally drawn with figures in black and red and scarcely defaced at all. The chief scene from those far vanished days evidently depicted a hunt. Plainly-figured wildebeest and other buck fled in a herd before human figures armed with bows. One beast was down, with an arrow sticking in him, and another was in the act of leaping high over its fallen companion. They looked at this in silence for awhile, and then Pamela, sharp-sighted and knowing besides what to expect, told Chris to carry the light on a bit farther. Here a crude and amazing beast stood by itself. It was probably meant for a hippo. Still farther, and not con-

nected with it, were more human figures obviously fighting, and it was here that the jackal-headed creature was drawn again as on the Umtamvuna, but this time mingling apparently with the men.

"If it's Anubis, I suppose you might call him the son of the devil," said Chris.

"No," said Pamela, "I don't think so. It's not quite that. Set was not the devil as we understand that gentleman. It's a different conception. He was god of the evil world—not this world, but the world of evil. Perhaps his son is more like our idea of fate, but mingling among men and driving them on to their deeds of crime and shame. Still, perhaps, the world of evil is after all meant to be this world, and perhaps Anubis still moves amongst us all, though we call him by different names and make no attempt to picture him."

Chris laughed. "You're a cheerful companion for a night in a gloomy cave," he said.

"Your nerves can stand it," retorted Pamela. "All the same, I wish we had Nanea here. I'd like to see if Haketsebe would recognise the place. Suppose we hypnotise one of the boys to-night? Philip might do; he's a trustful creature and knows me well. Or let me try on you. Think how entrancing it would be, Chris!"

He looked at her across the candle which was burning smokily with an over-long wick. Her narrowed eyes glittered in the light and there was the suspicion of a mocking smile about her mouth. But as he looked, her expression changed. Everything unpleasant died rapidly out of it. The smile widened and her lips parted slightly. It struck him again how red they seemed to have become. And he smiled back at her.

"Where are you going to sleep?" he asked. "Here?"

She glanced round. "I'll undress here," she said, "and Philip shall bring my bags in. That corner of rock is quite a good screen, and the hollow beyond shall be my dressing-

room. But I prefer to sleep where I can see the stars and not this roof of rock. Let's go and choose a place."

They walked to the entrance again, and away to the left found a perfect place—perfect, at least, if it did not rain. The cave rapidly narrowed here and became a mere shelf of rock, fringed at the edge with grass and bushes and loose stones, and allowing plenty of room to lie down. The rock-side was broken into small recesses or pockets which would do admirably, Chris said, for matches and candle and cigarettes. Some twenty feet above, the roof sloped slightly over and formed a protection from any light rain, but the wide expanse of valley and sky stretched away before them. Moreover it was a kind of cul-de-sac. One could approach from the cave proper, but not go on far beyond. The shelf ended in a breakaway of the cliff, which fell steeply a hundred feet or more.

"If it's all one to you, Chris," said Pamela, "I shall use the room in the cave for dressing but spread my blankets here. And if you put yours on the cave side of me, I shall be as safe as possible, and we can converse in the midnight hours if Anubis prevents our sleeping!"

"Right you are," said Chris amusedly. "I shall use it, however, as bedroom and dressing-room combined if you've no objection. That is to say, unless it rains. Then, I take it, we shall both have to invade the main cave. Where will the boys sleep?"

"Oh down there, round the fire. And now, since the daylight, such as it is, is fast departing, what about a kit inspection?"

For the next half hour they were busy. Their personal effects were carried to their respective dressing-rooms, and Pamela inspected all the stores. Philip turned out to be a first-class cook. The Eldreds' boy had been sent by him up the Pass with a water-bottle, and he now returned with it full of milk which he had got from herd-boys in a kraal up there. Philip had brought on from the Tselike the best

part of a sheep presented to them by the local chief, and they finally sat down to soup, chops and fried potatoes, and coffee, to which Chris added a liqueur of brandy from the bottle in the pack. They had to have candles before they had finished; and they sat on afterwards, smoking cigarettes and scarcely speaking, while the boys built up the fire from time to time with brushwood which flared high for a minute or two before dying down to a dull red glow, and threw ruddy shadows over the cave and the mountain-side. Now and again stars appeared in the sky, twinkled for a while, and then were dimmed out silently by masses of slow-moving clouds. Little sounds came up to them—the far-away murmur of the stream, the bark of a dog probably at the kraal of the herd-boys, and the occasional voices of their servants speaking in musical Sesuto.

Chris drew a deep breath at last, and reached for his pipe. "Lor', but this is good, Pam," he said, and there was an affectionate ring in his voice. "I owe this to you, old girl."

She did not at once reply. Then: "And fate," she said.

Chris struck his match and it burned steadily. "Wind has dropped," he said.

"Which means the likelihood of more rain," said Pamela.

"Don't suggest it," he replied, "or else touch wood, if there is any to touch. But seriously, Pam, why in the world do any of us ever live in towns and habitations?"

She chuckled. "You'll be glad enough to get back," she said. "Clubs, Chris, and theatres and champagne and Piccadilly Circus and——"

"Oh don't," he cried; "it's profanation!"

"Men are easily profane, I've noticed," said Pamela drily. "'Specs it's natural,' as Topsy said."

Chris smoked on in silence. As if the gods had heard him, the wind got up far away. African travellers know the kind of thing. For some unknown reason, it came blowing across the face of the earth, first a mere whisper

far far off, a sigh, scarcely that. Then nearer and nearer, ever more and more strong, rustling the grasses, blowing the acrid smoke of the fire across them, moaning in the rocks, howling down the Pass; and then passing, more and more faint, till it died absolutely away. Its last voice was the echo of a breath among the distant mountains.

"Anubis passes," said Pamela in a low tone.

It affected Chris far more than he cared to acknowledge. He glanced almost apprehensively behind him, and he was far from jesting. "One might believe anything up here," he said.

"Even in heaven—or in hell," said Pamela in the same tone.

"Or in purgatory," said Chris, with sudden bitterness.

"Why purgatory?" queried the girl.

The man moved restlessly and knocked out the dottle of his pipe. "Oh," he said, "that wind is like the sighing of souls outside the gates of paradise."

Pamela made a slight change in her position and slipped her hand into his arm. "Poor old Chris," she said.

He felt the light touch, but he did not move. Seconds slid by, and thoughts raced in both their minds. Pamela's were infinitely more deliberate; Chris's, questioning, dubious. In the end, they irritated him. "Let's turn in," he said. "It'll be warmer in the blankets."

Pamela laughed quietly and withdrew her hand, jumping to her feet. "Heavens!" she exclaimed, "I'm quite stiff! I wonder if Philip has arranged my bed."

The two moved together to the ledge and inspected it by the light of matches. The two valises lay side by side not a foot apart, the top string of each undone and the blankets within turned invitingly back. Chris smiled under cover of the dark, but Pamela was quite unperturbed.

"Do you snore, Chris?" she asked. "I think I won't risk it. Take my outfit by the head, will you, while I take it by the feet, and move it a bit farther away. Yes, that will do nicely. No, there's a stone, of course, selecting to

lie exactly where will shortly be the small of my back. That's better. And now I'll withdraw to my dressing-room. How long will you be? There's no door for me to knock upon before I come in."

"I shall probably be between the blankets before you've done to your hair whatever you do at night in the wilderness," he said, laughing.

But he exaggerated a little. For one thing he had to find convenient holes for so many things—studs and socks and the contents of his pocket. Then, when he had drawn off his shirt, he stood bare-backed in the night air for a few minutes, hidden there out of sight of the main cave. The wind caressed his skin and he stretched his arms out above his head. The silent sleeping valley lay at his feet and the sky was clearing again. Christopher Ashurst had ceased to pray, but a thought flashed through his mind as he stood there, drinking in the serene beauty of it all and the tonic of the night air. In his own modern way, he was saying his prayers. A movement below struck on his ear, and he glanced to the right. Philip, in his blankets, dimly seen in the light of the fire, was kneeling before he too turned in. Chris watched him a minute, and then he reached for his pyjama jacket and got between the bed clothes.

"Chris?" called Pamela, inquiringly.

"Yes."

"Are you in bed?"

"Yes."

"Right; then I'm coming."

He watched her shadowy figure emerge from the cave and come towards him. She stepped over his feet, a seemingly tall figure against the far sky, and he moved his head ever so little to watch her step into her valise. She serenely shed her dressing-gown, folded it, and put it into the bag beneath the head of her sleeping-outfit. Then she groped for a moment and drew out a cigarette case. "I

must have one more before I really try to go to sleep," she said. "Will you?"

"No, thanks," said Chris. "Don't set yourself afire."

"No fear," she replied, and struck a match. Its light revealed her face, her braided hair hanging over her shoulder, and her slight figure in her pyjamas. Then it died out, and, in the contrasting blackness, Chris could not see her actually get into bed. But as her rustling died down, the glow of her cigarette showed her to him again, well tucked in, her right arm under her head, and her left hand outside manipulating the cigarette. He watched its glowing end for a few minutes and then laughed.

"What's up now?" she queried.

"I was thinking how delightfully improper all this is," he said.

She chuckled in the darkness. "Oh rubbish," she replied. "Improper? Not a bit. Mrs. Grundy might think so, but then Mrs. Grundy is—well, Mrs. Grundy. We've done positively nothing improper. You haven't even kissed me good-night. Why, considering that we are cousins, you might easily have made that excuse!"

Chris was conscious again of that slight irritation he had felt in the morning. "You're always insisting on the cousinship," he said, "and, as a matter of fact, it's second or once removed or something, isn't it? Besides it was only this morning you told me you had kissed me for the first and last time."

Pamela chuckled again. "Perhaps," she said, banteringly. "But I didn't say anything about your kissing me. Or does it take two to make a kiss? I've had so little experience."

Chris suddenly and acutely remembered recent kisses. "Don't, Pam," he exclaimed, half involuntarily.

"Oh I'm so sorry," she said quickly, in quite another tone of voice. "Forgive me, Chris."

He warmed at her words. "It's all right, dear," he said.

Her cigarette glowed for the last time as she drew on it, and then disappeared as she ground out the red hot end in the sandy earth by her side. In the darkness she rustled about a little again, and then was still.

"Good-night, Chris," she said.

"Good-night," said he

Miles away, Cecil, unable to sleep, moved ever so quietly in bed lest Hugh should still be awake. Her wet handkerchief was a crushed ball in her hand. She could not get the words she had heard that day out of her ears. A voice seemed to drone them endlessly. "I am the Resurrection and the Life," it said. "The Resurrection and the Life; and the Life; the Resurrection and the Life;"—oh, endlessly.

CHAPTER III

CHRIS dreamed that he was swimming, and he revelled in the cool sting of the water. He got out on some sort of a rock for a dive, and then Cecil appeared suddenly and began to splash him. He jumped into the sea to clasp and duck her, and awoke. It was light, and a small rain was falling on his face. Also he was cold. He swore gently and looked round for Pamela. She was still asleep, for since she had been lying nearer the rock than he her face was hardly wet. He slipped out of his valise, put on a Burberry over his pyjamas, and went over to the boys. Philip was up and making a fire. With his help, Chris got out a small patrol tent, inserted its poles, and carried it like an umbrella to Pamela. She was apparently dead asleep, and he thought as he looked at her how tired she must have been. Without waking her, they rigged the tent up more or less securely so that it sheltered her valise, and Chris threw another blanket gently over her body.

Then he surveyed the world at large more carefully, but it was rather a dreary prospect. Rain-mists hid the farther side of the valley and Philip gave it as his opinion that it would be wet all day. So Chris decided to vent his wrath on something. He put a towel round his neck as a muffler under his Burberry, took his gun, rolled up his pyjama trousers to the knee, slipped on an old pair of slippers, and left the cave. For half an hour he toiled among slippery wet rocks and grass, but he got warm in the process and began to realise that it was all very lovely anyhow. The valley was clean, silent, wild, and the air invigorated him. At last he reached the river and had two shots at doves as they flew up from the willows. His first

shot missed, but his second brought down a couple. One, of course, fell into the river. The pool into which it drifted was deep and calm, well ringed with great rocks and trees, and very tempting, despite the rain, to the man warmed with exercise. He thought he would fulfil what he could of his dream, threw off his things, and took a cautious header into the pool. It was not a bit too cold, and very refreshing. He swam a few yards, turned on his back, kicked up the water in a cloud of spray for the sheer joy of living, rolled over again, and made with a swift trudgeon stroke for the bank. Seizing a willow branch, he pulled himself half out of the water and found himself staring into the amused eyes of a couple of native women closely wrapped in blankets.

These incontinently fled. Chris finished pulling himself out with a laugh, towelled down, and resumed his pyjamas and mackintosh. He strung his birds together, picked up his gun, and set off down the course of the stream feeling himself a kind of Robinson Crusoe.

There had been a rift of blue in the sky, but when he regained the cave even that had disappeared. The rain was falling distinctly heavily. He threw the birds to Philip and entered the mouth of the cave to find that the boys had laid out his clothes on his valise with the contents of his pockets from the rock face of the sleeping place. Pamela was not to be seen, and he began to dress, and was fastening his braces when he heard her laugh behind him. She was standing in her 'dressing-room,' half in and half out of the 'door,' wearing a kimono and brushing her hair.

"Hullo," he said, "good-morning. I wondered if you were awake, or if you had gone inside to finish your sleep."

"Well I am awake," said Pamela. "Isn't it a beastly morning? What's to be done?"

"Have breakfast," replied Chris. "I'm dying of hunger. Are you nearly ready? It's not half as bad out as it looks."

"Five minutes," she called, and disappeared.

They discussed porridge and eggs and bacon not with-

out a certain return of good humour. "Really," said Chris, "it's rather amusing. What's to be done? as you rightly say. I suppose we can, one, go back; two, stay here; three, go on. What do you say?"

"No, to the first, emphatically," she replied, slapping marmalade on to bread and butter. "Why should we go back? Are you bored with me already? No; well, then, we don't go back; that's settled. As to going on, I vote we ask Philip. He'll have views. He has some sense, that boy."

"Right," said Chris. "Philip!"

"Baas!" He came running up.

"What's to be done?" demanded Chris. "Shall we go on? How far can we get in this rain and where shall we camp to-night? Do you know another cave?"

The boy grinned after the manner of his kind. "Other cave much too far," he said. "Road very bad, and rivers very full in Sehonghong. We go on if baas wishes, but I think it will rain all day to-day and all to-morrow. If baas go, we camp in rain—very bad for missus. Very cold up there too."

"There you are," said Pamela. "That's my view. Also, why go on? We have plenty of food, plenty of fuel here, a dry place, and lots of time. I vote we wait till the rain stops if we wait a week! Give me a cigarette."

Chris smiled and handed her his case. "Very well, Philip," he said, "you hear the words of the missus. The other boy had better go and see if the horses are all right, and you can think of a good dinner for to-night."

"Boy been already," said Philip. "What baas say to stew to-night?"

Pamela chuckled. "The day of stews now begins," she said. "We'll leave that to you, Philip."

"Right, missus," he said, and withdrew.

Chris commenced to fill his pipe. "And what do we do?" he demanded. "Sit here all day? There are cards in the pack; we can play picquet."

"And I can tell your fortune," she replied, "but not now. I suggest that we assume bathing kit and macs., and go off for a walk and a bathe. Also explore. The mud won't matter; the world is before us; and no one about or likely to be."

"I've bathed once," he said, "and had an audience of two native women. I was *au naturel,* too."

She smiled. "But you can watch me this time," she said.

They went off finally together, to the amusement of the natives who saw no necessity for such exertion, but spent the morning exploring mutton bones for their marrow. Chris had had no morning quite like it in all his life and began to wish it would rain for a fortnight. In the valley they shed and hid their clothes under a great rock, and, with their exercise, they were warm enough and were continually half in and half out of the water. They dived for white stones in the pools, swam to little beaches ungetatable except by water, discovered a forest of bamboo through which they wandered with the world out of sight, climbed high crags over the stream, and lay half exhausted after a swimming race on a bed of pure white sand. Pamela was wholly in her element. In her tight-fitting simple bathing-suit, with bare strong arms and legs and her hair in one thick plait, she looked like a nymph of the stream. She was well knit like an athlete rather than full-formed, her breasts firm, her shoulders grace and strength. Chris, indeed, had had no idea how strong she was or how thoroughly at home in such surroundings. She knew the names of all the birds and plants and the uses to which the natives put them. She was not in the least like a man companion, but she was equally unlike any other girl he had met. This was exactly how he would have liked to have spent a day with Cecil and how he knew she would have liked to have spent it with him. Yet he knew that even she would not in some ways have been so ideal a companion as Pamela proved herself to be. She would not have forgotten—or apparently have forgotten—her sex as Pamela did. He

knew well enough that they would not have gone far, but on some such bed as this have spent the hours in each other's arms. At the thought he hid his face in his hands, but raised it in a minute to look at Pamela and wonder if she would have cared so to spend it with anyone as well.

She lay at the moment face downwards on the sand, resting on her elbows and digging idly in it with her fingers, her toes delving into the soft stuff also. Her usually rather colourless face was flushed with exercise and wet with rain, and if no one would ordinarily call her beautiful, her figure at any rate was such, and her features at least intensely interesting.

"Penny for your thoughts," said Chris suddenly, like a boy.

She propped her face on a sandy hand and looked up at him, her eyes narrowing and a smile of amusement gathering at her mouth. "Worth more," she said.

"How much?"

"More than you have to give, Chris," she said enigmatically.

"Pam, you're a beast. Shall I tell you what I was thinking? I was wondering whether, if I were an artist in paint and not in print, I could get you to pose for me. If I asked it of you, would you pose for me in the nude? Or would your unconventionality stop short at that?"

"I was inclined to say right off that I would certainly," she said after a second's hesitation that had in it, however, no sign of embarrassment, "but I'm not quite sure, to be honest."

"Why not?"

"Because, perhaps, I can't think of you as an artist. I very much doubt if you could be one. I doubt if you could treat me as a model. An artist, for whom I would pose without a second's hesitation, would see my body as a beautiful natural thing, and as nothing more. So far as I am concerned, he might do so, and, far from minding, I

should think it a great honour to inspire a good picture. But you would see me as a nude woman known to you, as Pamela Urfurd without her clothes. And I'm not sure that I would permit that."

Chris was distinctly annoyed again. "Do you know," he said, "that you've said several beastly things to me, fair cousin, since we started on this excursion. Do you honestly think I'm such a rotter as all that?"

"I never said you were a rotter," she retorted.

"You implied it."

"I did not. I told you that I thought you were not sufficiently an artist for such a test with me. That is so. You are, I fancy, very much of a man. I do not even necessarily like you the less for it."

"So you were *not sure* whether or not you would pose for the mere man," said Chris slowly, staring at her.

Pamela made no reply. She merely raised her eyes and looked at him, with her head, characteristically, slightly on one side.

To do Chris justice, that look was a surprise to him. He had not angled for it. But being Chris he could hardly fail to respond—or so at least she thought. He moved distinctly nearer to her and put his hand on her arm. "Eh, Pamela?" he said softly. "Would you?"

She chuckled. "Well, at any rate, I am *not sure,*" she repeated, and rolled over in the sand on to her back, putting one hand beneath her head, stretching the other arm out to its full extent, and lazily watching her fingers as she opened and shut them.

There was such abandon in her pose, such insinuation in her words, that the blood pounded in Chris's temples. He half moved towards her, and then, suddenly and inconsequently, recalled Cecil. He ceased to move, and lay quite still. The blood ebbed from his face. It was Pamela's turn to be surprised, and she turned her head to look at him. "You're very silent all of a sudden," she said smiling.

He jumped suddenly to his feet. "God!" he exclaimed. "I believe you're half a devil, Pamela!"

She was not in the least annoyed. "Possibly," she said, "half devil and half woman. Which half do you want, Chris? Or is the combination so displeasing?" And with her little chuckle, she, too, leaped up, lithe and unexpected, ran swiftly forward and dived suddenly far out into the stream at their feet, cleaving the water with scarcely a splash, a train of little bubbles rising where she had disappeared.

Chris hesitated a moment on the brink and then went in after her. Down in the cool green depths, gliding to the full extent of his plunge, he was conscious of a revulsion of feeling. "Cecily, Cecily darling," he whispered to himself, "I won't forget." But he hated himself as he realised how near a thing it had been.

Pamela was wise enough to see that she had gone far enough that morning, and after lunch, she remained in the cave making a careful sketch of the Bushman paintings while Chris departed up the sides of the pass with his gun to have a shot at the rock pigeons. It was dusk when he returned, exceedingly pleased with a big bag. Then they sat on the ground together and had sundowners, while Philip developed immense activity and prepared roast pigeon for their evening meal. It was a great success, and afterwards, by the light of a candle-lantern, they played their picquet. Pamela held all the cards however, so that the game palled on them both in a little and they agreed mutually and without words to stop it. Pamela sat there idly shuffling the cards, and at length looked up slantwise at her companion who was staring out into the night, his thoughts far away. "Come, Chris," she said, "I'll tell your fortune."

He rolled over towards her, amusedly. "All right," he said, "what do I do? Cross your hand with silver?"

"Oh no. Shuffle well and cut, that's all."

He did so, and lay watching her long thin fingers dealing

out seven small packs. "The first is yourself," she said, dealing it, "the second your house, the third your friends, the fourth what is coming to you, the fifth is certain to come true, the sixth is your wish, and the last and seventh only the dealer may see."

"Oh rot," he said. "I want to see that as well."

"Well you can't. And if you do, the whole thing will be meaningless."

Chris roared with laughter so that, in the silent night, the boys around the fire turned their heads momentarily to watch. "I might as well look then," he said.

Pamela smiled secretly. "Have you wished?" she demanded.

Chris sobered suddenly. "Yes," he said shortly.

Pamela, her eyes on his face, shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly but said nothing to that.

"Well," she went on, still looking at him, "what are you, I wonder? Let me see, the king of diamonds I should say. Yes, and you cut up in the first pack; with a very fair, almost red-haired woman, I should think—not rich, young. Now for your home—why this is funny—it's at sea, I think; let us say a ship—and here's the girl again, and there's love between you, a kiss at any rate."

Chris gave a little exclamation. Pamela looked up at him, very solemnly. "One never can tell if it's past or future at first," she said. "Have you any idea?"

Chris bit his lip in the dark. "I'm quite sure it's a lot of rubbish," he said.

Pamela chuckled interiorly (if there is such a thing). She was wickedly enjoying herself for she was well aware that he could not possibly divine how she would know anything of this. She took up the next pack. "The fourth shows us what you will not get, as well as what you will, and I much fear, Chris, that that's the red-haired girl. There's no trace of her. There's a lot of money in it though, and a journey, so I dread lest you are going to be insufferably rich and will probably go on some journey or

other that you expect or plan. That's all I can see there. The fifth is certain to come true. Hum—hum. I don't quite understand. There's a birth in it, and a letter—oh, I can't read that! The sixth is your wish. Well, you're here anyway, between two women, both dark—the very fair one has quite gone, I fear, Chris. And that card's your wish. It's curious, its being placed like that. It's doubtful still, I think, but more likely to come true than not. There's a man mixed up with it, but not exactly interfering. Yet he seems to have control of the situation. But it's these women whom I can't understand. It looks almost as if either might give it you or perhaps either prevent it. Best have nothing to do with the women, Chris —which is good advice but difficult for a person like yourself to follow. And the seventh, the dealer alone may see." And she picked up the cards and fell to studying them, keeping their backs towards him.

Chris made a sudden snatch at them, but she was too sharp for him, flinging them quickly on the pack and hastily confusing it. He laughed, with a slight note of vexation in his merriment. Pamela drew up her legs and clasped her hands round her knees. "You might at least say thank you," she said.

"Do you really believe that rubbish, Pam?" he demanded.

She shrugged her shoulders. To herself she said silently, "Everything's fair in love—and war."

"You're an odd girl," he went on, "but it's curious with the cards how sometimes, almost—— And all races have believed in them," he added meditatively. Then, turning sharply to her, "Look here, Pam, what do you really make of those words of Haketsebe's: 'The weak shall be strong and the strong shall be weak.' She certainly seemed right over the Falls of the Tselike for it was emphatically a place of fate. But which of us did she mean by the rest of it? Have you any idea?"

"No," said the girl slowly, "I don't understand. Hon-

estly I don't, Chris. But I believe it was more than mere nonsense. I fancy we shall understand one day. Also the last sentence: 'The voice of the child is not to be silenced.' But that I think I understand more than anything else."

"Well, what does that mean? I see no particular sense in it."

She said nothing, nor did she look at him.

"Well?" he queried impatiently.

She released her knees and turned round to him, her eyes glowing in the candle light. He stared back at her and was suddenly aware again of the unfathomable depth of those eyes. The place, the time, even something conjured up by her fortune-telling, laid some sort of a spell on him, and he made no effort to resist them. They burned very brightly, he thought, and her face seemed to him to grow larger. He had no idea whether it was five seconds or five minutes that he had sat so, and he heard the mournful eerie cry of an owl flying by night, first close at hand and then farther and farther away as it sped up the valley, as if the sound came from another world and had no relation to him. Then she spoke, and he was dimly aware of a curious sense of wonder. It was as if she spoke within him and not exteriorly at all. He, himself, was not at first aware of what she said. Then it dawned on him: "What do you see? What do you see?" she was saying insistently. He peered at her, at those big eyes, into those deep pools. What did he see? Did he see anything? He would look, look; she should not ask in vain. And then, suddenly, he felt afraid; he did not want to see. He tried to pull up, for he was slipping down, down, down, yes, down and down and down. With the last vestige of semi-consciousness he told himself that it was only Pamela, little Pamela; he was not afraid of her! He willed to look deep down, or he thought he willed. And then . . . "What do you see?" demanded a voice again, not Pamela's voice surely; "What do you see? Tell me!"

Then he saw. He thought at first it was water, but he looked closely and more curiously. No, it was not water. It was more like mist, a smoke, a swirling stream of it, rushing incessantly and silently by, writhing and tossing as if it were alive. He knew that it was alive—no, that it was life. An idea glimmered in the back of his brain, the memory of a phrase, 'the ocean of becoming.' He did not know that he said it aloud.

"Whom?" demanded that now resistless voice, "Whom? Whom do you see?"

Well, there was no one. Yes, there was. Oh God, he had not noticed! Deep, deep down, deeper, deeper,—he would reach her—a face, a figure—Cecily. He cried her name, cried to her, but she would not look at him. She was holding something in her arms, bending over it. The swirling stuff hid it, but perhaps if he bent lower, closer, he would see. He leant nearer, much nearer; he looked, as it were, over her shoulder. Oh it was Ronnie, of course, and the child was smiling at him. He could see its eyes. They puzzled him. There was something he ought to remember, he knew that. And then he knew. "But Ronnie is dead," he muttered stupidly.

Then Cecil turned and looked at him. He forgot the child; he forgot everything. Her eyes were as they had been that day she rode away from him, years and years ago, by the Falls of the Tselike, and he cried some foolish thing, like a child, as he read what seemed to him to be accusation in them. But never mind her eyes; it was her lips that he desired so passionately. He bent forward still more. "Kiss, kiss," he whispered huskily.

She did not refuse him. He felt them hungrily beneath his own, warm red lips. Still kissing, he raised his eyes to her again. Oh, but it was not Cecily at all; it was Pamela! A sudden sense of his mistake and disappointment shot through him like the stab of a knife. He jerked his head back swiftly, and was aware of the candle that flickered in its lantern, and of the arched roof above him, and of Pam-

ela sitting there, flushed, silent. He stared at her. His hand reached out and touched the blankets on which they were sitting, and felt the texture, very real and warm. He was rapidly becoming himself again, but as swiftly as a sense of his surroundings returned, he forgot, or nearly forgot, what he had seen. He found himself talking stupidly. "What did you say?" he asked aimlessly.

Pamela laughed a little harshly, and got up. Chris stared up at her, still a little confused. "Pam," he said helplessly, "did I go to sleep? I thought I saw Cecily. I remember now. And I kissed her—no, it was you I kissed. Oh, Pamela, what the devil did I do?" And he too was on his feet.

Her face changed, and grew very tender. She slipped her arm lightly and confidingly into his. "It was nothing, my dear," she said. "You were sleepy, I think. Anyway it is time to turn in now. Wouldn't you like a night-cap? I see Philip has put my valise into my dressing-room tonight and yours away down there, in that other room, for fear of the rain, I suppose. Will you get another candle? There are some in the pack by the fire. And a glass will be over there too. See, the boys have turned in; we have the place to ourselves. You have your flask? Good-night. I'm off to bed. But don't hesitate to call me if you want anything."

She had been leading him into the cave, and talking, he thought, as if to fill up time. But there was a singular caress in her voice, and he was wide awake now anyway. He was suddenly very conscious of her, and aware that she was very desirable and he tired and lonely. After all, she was dear old Pam, and he wanted sympathy and—and forgetfulness. Where were the boys? Oh yes, over there, asleep by the fire. They were alone, and she had said it. . . . "Yes, I'll get a night-cap," he said. "Good-night, dear."

"Good-night," she said again, and left him.

He walked uncertainly across the soft floor to the dying

fire, and by its light, fumbled for a candle and a glass. No, glasses. He poured out and tossed off a first tot and waited a little to allow it to clear his head; now two more, one for himself and one for Pamela. He splashed some more water in, with a steadying hand as his purpose became clearer to himself, set the candle in another lantern, and swung it on his wrist. Then, a glass in each hand, he walked over to her side of the cave.

The light from her candle shone out round the projecting shoulder of rock that made her insufficient door. Grotesque shadows came and went in it, made by her movements within. Chris advanced slowly. He was remembering that incident by the swollen river, and could almost feel again her warm body under his hand. At the partition he spoke. "Pam, dear," he said.

Pamela had heard him coming, of course, but she had gone on brushing her hair with slow deliberate movements, a little smile hovering on her lips. She had taken off her blouse and skirt, but she had made no attempt to reach a wrap. "Yes?" she said.

"Won't you have a night-cap as well? I've brought you one."

Pamela could not help a little chuckle. She gave one swift little glance at all she could see of herself in the travelling mirror propped up before her. Then: "You're a dear," she said. "Yes, I will, if you will excuse the *négligé*." And she stepped with deliberation half round the rocks towards him.

He could see her quite plainly, in her dainty laces, her hair tumbling about her shoulders, a comb in her hand. She took the whisky, and raised it to him. "Cheerio," she said, smiling.

He moved ever so slightly forward and held out his own glass. It chinked on hers. "To luck and love, Pamela," he said softly. And they drank.

He swallowed the spirit and felt its secret flame tingle in him. She held out her empty glass to him, and he took it, his eyes on her face. Another step—surely he read

aright—and she would not resist if he took her in his arms. Yet he hesitated. Again, in the very moment, he remembered Cecil. Something in the other's very readiness recalled the drawing-room at Springfontein. The thought of her grew swiftly on him like a physical presence; indeed he turned his eyes from his cousin's face to search involuntarily the darkness beyond them. The action saved him. A sense of his loss and desolation swept upon him, and he drew himself up. "Well, good-night, Pam," he said again, and turned sharply away.

Pamela's little mirror was stuck up above her candle on a rocky shelf, and she went back to it, staring at her own face in its light. A little frown gathered involuntarily there. "'The weak shall be strong and the strong shall be weak,'" she muttered to herself. "But it's humiliating. It looks as if I had interpreted it before the wrong way about. Cecily, my dear, if it wasn't for you, I'd chuck in my hand. What else does the man want me to do?"

She finished undressing and slipped into her blankets. But she was brave enough to face quite frankly her own thoughts. "Dear old Chris," she said to herself, "I didn't think he had so much in him."

Chris, on his part, rolled himself in his blankets and stared out at the night. He tried to reconstruct the evening and was not able easily to do so. "By Jove," he said to himself, "that girl pretty near hypnotised me in more senses than one! And there's a week at least yet! Christopher, my son, there must be no more playing with fire if you don't want to get burned!"

He lay a while considering. For the conventions, he cared not at all. For ordinary morality, he had precious little use. And Pamela was his counsin—once removed, perhaps, but still his cousin. There was the family to consider. He liked Urfurd, and he knew Urfurd liked him. For that matter, an engagement, a swift marriage even, would only please them all. But Cecily, little Cecily. . . . His heart warmed

at the thought of her, and grew very tender. There was no one on earth like Cecily, his little Cecily. . . . And closing his eyes, he slept.

Without, the rain fell steadily, relentlessly.

CHAPTER IV

NOWHERE are changes in temperature more rapid than in the Drakensberg. Chris slept badly because of the growing warmth, and in the dawn gave up the attempt to sleep at all. He got up and went to the mouth of the cave, and stood drinking in the early sunlight and the glory of it all. Birds chirped in the rain-washed bushes. Both boys were away, Philip gathering brushwood at a little distance, and the other, Motseke, climbing a stony path a mile off in his search for the horses who appeared to have wandered a little in the night. Chris felt in a packbag for a new box of cigarettes, and was in the act of lighting one when he heard his name.

"Chris!" called Pamela, and then, taking in the beauty of the morning, "oh, isn't it good! I must come out." And just as she was, in her pyjamas, looking very young and sweet, she suited the action to the word and joined him. "A perfect day," she declared. "Let's go off and bathe quickly. We ought to make an early start."

The frank companionship of the earlier hours yesterday seemed to have come back to them both. In their bathing kit and kimonos this time they went down to the river and had a dip, and as frankly and companionably returned. Breakfast was a scratch affair—coffee and rusks—while the boys saddled up, and soon they were heading for the lip of the Pass, talking freely and gaily of the things about them.

Once over the toilsome climb to the very top, there was good going. The veld shone in the sun, and every little peaty pool reflected the clear blue above them. A string of duck rose off a little lake, but Chris made no effort to get

at his gun. "It's too good a morning to kill anything," he said. "I fear I'm not a proper Englishman and not more than half a sportsman. I want to shoot only when the pot requires it, or when I feel savage. Your average Englishman shoots for exactly the opposite reasons, unless he's obliged."

Thus, then, began the companionship of three days and two nights of travelling which had its own effect on both of them, but especially on Pamela. They were, of course, thrown entirely upon each other's company during hours of exceeding monotony if of real beauty. They had decided, time being no particular object, to go on to Mokhotlong and up from there to Mont aux Sources, and that meant traversing border country almost the whole way. Border country is rough, wild and comparatively barren; it offers indeed incomparable views, air like wine, and a spectacle of savage grandeur in crag and peak that once seen is never forgotten. But hour by hour the track winds interminably over broken plateaux and moors. A few birds, an occasional sheep—that is all. Pace is set by the pack ponies, and the jogging of the wearied riding horses of the travellers dominates their existence. As one rounds a corner, there is the leader ahead; as one glances back, there is the straggler behind. That is all. For oneself—jog, jog, jog;—that is all.

Nine-tenths of such a day cannot be described. There is a minutiæ of incident, for the most part, which is merely cumulative in effect. There is the vastness of things; there is the silence; there are a thousand moments; and there is one's companion. Looking back, the nights will stand out, and perhaps the dawns; a lunch hour or two; possibly a minor accident when a strap broke. But these do not account for the days, nor do these explain why one's fellow traveller bulks so big in the retrospect. He, and the million little unnoticed things, that is the trek.

To Pamela, then, Chris and the million little unnoticed things made up the trek. She had said to herself, that night in the cave, that she did not know he had so much in him, but what exactly he had in him, only such days as these

could show her. Imperceptibly, they wrought a change on Pamela in this regard. She had said of herself that she was not sentimental, and it was without sentiment that she had begun their odyssey. Cecil needed saving; that was all. She knew her cousin well enough to be aware that, trifler as he might be in a flirtation on shipboard, he was honourable at bottom. If she snared him, snared him even to one unguarded hour of passion, Cecily was saved. Her body was to be the bait; put blankly, it was not the prettiest business; it was like her that she did not hesitate. Gwen had not called her ruthless for nothing.

But she had reckoned without the Drakensberg. She had not realised what the mountains and the solitudes might have to say. Foiled in the Pass, she had expected to try night by night, or wait the chance of an hour, until—— But Chris was at hand all the day, at hand with a laugh, a cheery philosophy, a story of his wanderings somewhere or another; at hand with a cigarette, a blanket, a little help here or there, and all without a trace of sentiment which would have spoilt it for her. Pamela postponed her temptation. She gave herself up to the ease of the moment and the zest of the rough living. And in the end—well, even at the end a woman's soul is a very secret thing. But Pamela had heard the shouting of the sons of God for joy in the dawns and at the sunsets during days and nights of mystery, and it was not in Pamela at least to hear in vain.

They off-saddled for lunch on a stream that Philip assured them was the Tselike near its source, but it was hard to believe it as they seemed to have been travelling too far north. But it was a matter of indifference to both of them. All the world was good that day wherever they journeyed. Besides it was at any rate a clear purling brook that flowed between grassy banks, with mealy lands and a native settlement at a little distance. Then on, and up. Always up. Pamela knew what to expect, and explained that now they left a big peak of the range—Thatamatuwe—on their right (that was it, she supposed, pointing to a sugar-loaf of a mountain

half hid in drifting mist clouds) and climbed up to the 10,000 foot level. It certainly was a climb. Cultivated lands grew fewer and finally ceased altogether. The road became a mere track and in places practically disappeared. All the afternoon they rode across a barren plateau on which grew little but a strange green shrub (good for the fire even when green, Philip said), dry brownish grass, and occasionally most lovely flowering rushes, each with half a dozen or more fairy bells of white and pink swaying in the breeze three or four feet above the ground.

Pamela grew a little tired, but she would not show it. Towards night-fall they reached an open depression in the high veld, making a great cup perhaps a mile to a mile and a half wide, rather wet and crossed by innumerable streams. Groups of half-wild ponies grazed around and fled with streaming tails and manes before them, and here Philip and Motseke rode for awhile together and obviously had a discussion. Philip at last, reined up his pony and waited for them. "Best camp here, *morena,*" he said to Chris.

"What's this place, then?" demanded Christopher.

"That the Mashai, down there," the boy answered, pointing with his finger. "Very steep bad place down there. We go on to-morrow round him, over those hills *morena* see across the veld. But no good place up there for camp."

"Isn't it damp here, Philip?" Chris queried. "And what about the fire?"

"Oh plenty *liso, morena,* and we find dry place for tents."

So it was agreed. The horses were turned loose after careful inspection of their backs lest they should have rubbed sores, and the two tents put up on a bit of rising ground within a cluster of great boulders. Motseke took his blanket and, using it as a bag, wandered off after the sun-dried dung that the natives call *liso.* Pamela watched him, and then said chuckling to Chris: "I shall do the same. You go one way and I'll go the other. Bet you I get most!"

Half an hour later, in the now thickly gathering dusk, Chris looked back on the little encampment. It looked

surprisingly tiny in that vast expanse, and when he stood still there was not a sound to be heard. The fire was already alight, burning with an occasional flicker of red welcoming flame and with a great streamer of grey smoke. Their two tiny patrol tents looked infinitely small among the rocks. Pamela was not visible; she had gone towards the many streamlets that made up the river whilst he had struck up towards the Border. The horses were mostly invisible too, except the grey pack who never strayed far from the camp. And low down, far over Basutoland, hung the Southern Cross.

His blanket was pretty full by now, and he sat down to think. The peace of the place enveloped him like a sentient thing. It seemed as if there were a presence there, brooding over all, and as if earth and sky waited—waited perhaps for the rise of that curtain that hangs so impalpably between the seen and the unseen. Then, he thought, would that Presence step out amongst them. And whose? Up here, it seemed impossible not to say God's.

Supper was a stew to-night beyond question, mainly composed of the contents of a tin of bully beef, though one came across surprise bits of pigeon. The spell of the place had fallen on Pamela too, and they neither of them spoke much. Once, when they had finished and Motseke had gone off with the plates to the nearest stream, she said: "Chris, I understand that bit in the gospels to-night where Peter at the Transfiguration wanted to make his tabernacles. I feel as if I'd like to make a tabernacle here for good and all. It is good to be here."

He nodded, and did not attempt a conventional answer. "But down below there were devils," he said. "We too, it seems, have to go down to them."

"To cast them out I suppose," she said, thoughtfully.

They did not make the progress next day which Philip had apparently expected. They were late in starting, for one thing, and for another, the packs gave trouble on the road and had to be taken off and adjusted two or three times.

The weather held however, and neither cared. They lunched at the head of a long valley, that of the Linakaneng river, and then commenced to follow it up. Lands appeared again, but chiefly of wheat, and among the wheat grew scarlet gladioli that reminded Chris of the valley he and Cecil had ridden up side by side on leaving Qacha's Nek. Wild mint bloomed fragrantly by the water and scented the hot air, and the hill-sides were clothed with masses of a dark brick-red flower whose name they did not know. They rode swiftly here, through little paths among the sun-lit stalks and grasses saddle high, though the river wound interminably, and it seemed an impossible direction when Philip insisted on a sharp right-angled turn to the north and a climb up what was almost another pass. The path zigzagged up, and soon they had to walk. They stumbled up together, and at the top Pamela threw herself on the ground. "Oh, Lor', Chris," she said, "I thought we'd never get up. Aren't you dead-beat? My word, but this is trekking!"

"Where next?" asked Chris.

The charm and peace of the river-valley had fled. A gloomy waste stretched about them and a wind had come up chill from somewhere. They called Philip, and he came up as cheerful as ever.

"Where the devil are you taking us to?" demanded Chris.

"*Morena* see soon," said the boy. "We cross this *vlei* and ride down the Linakeng river. Down there, we find the village of Motseke's uncle's brother, and we sleep there. They give missus huts and a sheep I think."

"But where the blazes is Mokhotlong?" demanded Chris again. "I thought you said we should get there, or to a store, to-night."

"To-morrow, *morena*," said Philip smiling.

"The land of to-morrow," chuckled Pamela. "Come on, Chris. 'All our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death.' That's where to-day will light us if we stay much longer in this ghastly place."

Night fell, and they were still in the saddle. Motseke led, and Chris followed the grey pack-horse who could be seen ghostly ahead. Pamela followed him. Down, down, down. They reached a river. In and out, in and out, up and down; Chris even began to get sleepy in the saddle. Pamela had been silent for some time; then, "Lights ahead!" she cried suddenly.

That late arrival in the native village was unforgettable. It stood fairly high on a little plateau over the river, and a big fire was blazing before the semicircle of huts. In the light of it, dark faces gathered round them and much talk burst out. Women and children came to the doors of the wind-screen reed fences in front of the round huts, and a head-man in a blanket came solemnly up to shake hands. He spoke rapidly in Sesuto, and Pamela translated that if they would be patient and wait a minute, a hut would be got ready for them.

"Do you want to sleep in a hut?" asked Chris.

"Oh yes," she said. "Their huts are very clean as a rule. I have often done it."

"Well, we can't both sleep in the hut, I suppose," said Chris, "though I don't know why a hut should be worse than a cave, do you? However I'll have a tent put up, I think." And he called to Philip.

"All right, but we can both eat in it, anyway. Look, it's ready. Oh here's the head-man's wife," and Pamela shook hands with a fat smiling woman who was prepared to usher her in.

The hut was round, some six feet high at the top of the rough stone walls and perhaps nine feet in the centre. The walls were ornamented with patterns and figures in coloured earths, rudely done, and a weird variety of things were hung on pegs or stuck into the thatch—their hostess' skirts, empty bottles, some spears, a sheepskin, bags of tobacco woven from grass, a bundle of twine, an ancient Tower carbine, and what proved to be a prayer and hymn book wrapped in a handkerchief. A pile of grain-bags occupied half the wall space,

and a couple of chairs, one minus its back, were brought in for them, as also a three-legged native stool roughly fashioned out of a piece of log. Three half-naked little brats of children crouched in the doorway, and ran off laughing when Pamela tried to get them to come farther in. Philip and Motseke appeared with the bags and saddles, all of which they proposed to store in the hut. Chris asked for water in which to wash, but this was more of a luxury as the river ran some distance below, and the basin that made its appearance held but a limited supply. However, as Pamela said, it was clean dirt on their hands, and they made a rough toilet and sat down to wait events.

Pamela had begged Chris to say nothing about food but to see what was brought them. In due time a procession appeared—the head-man, his wife, the eldest child, and their own boys. In various dishes, a chicken, about a dozen hard-boiled eggs, some native wheat-bread looking like penny buns and tasting excellent when new, a bowl of beans and another of *mafi* or thick milk, made their appearance. With renewed apologies for having what they called nothing to offer them, the natives withdrew.

Pamela sprang up. "Now," she cried, "don't move and I'll prepare the dinner." She got out their tin plates, mugs and cutlery, sent off Philip to make the coffee, and opened a tin of blackberry and apple jam and another of anchovy paste. "Course one," she said, "eggs and anchovy. I'm sorry there is no toast but they go well together without it. Course two, chicken, beans and bread; course three (sweets), *mafi* and jam; and coffee to wash it down. Chris, you won't fare better even when you get back to London!"

The ride had sharpened their appetites, and there was an air about Pamela that was infectious. But the supper was good. Two candles, stuck to the mud floor by their own grease, made the illumination, and through the open door, over the top of the *lelapa*,* twinkled the stars. They could hear the voices of the men from where they sat out of

* *Lelapa* (Sesuto), wind-screen of reeds built before a hut door.

sight around the village fire, and from some hut along the line to the left the occasional laughter of women. In every moment's silence, the ceaseless song of the river below came up to them.

Chris took his last spoonful of *mafi* and set the plate on the floor. Pamela looked at him and chuckled. "Good?" she queried.

"Perfectly priceless," he said. "Have you finished? May I smoke?"

"Do," she said. "I've only coffee to finish, but I won't light up yet."

His pipe going, Chris said thoughtfully, "There's something extraordinarily attractive about this. I've travelled a good deal among natives, but never quite like this. I owe it to you, I think. If I'd been alone, I should have camped outside the village and eaten my own stuff in my tent. But you know, this hospitality of theirs is very wonderful and delightful. Are the Basuto different from other South African tribes in this?"

"Yes and no," said Pamela. "Yes, because they're not conquered. This is their own country. They're far more rich than the farm natives in the Free State or even most of the Zulus in Natal. Some whites call them cheeky, but that's all rubbish to my way of thinking. On the whole, the native is a real if a raw gentleman. Up here, where he is free and on his own earth, he is hospitable to a fault and takes a pride in it. But the Basuto are different from the others in that on the whole they don't cringe and don't treat a white man as necessarily their superior. We are 'chiefs' of course, each of us, by virtue of our colour, but not masters. If you resent that, you will call these people cheeky; if you understand it and live up to it, you'll like them."

"It's plain how you regard it," said Christopher meditatively.

"I suppose it is. And I'm not ashamed of it. I think sometimes I wouldn't mind living up here, or even in Pondoland,

all my days. The native is a primitive man, but I don't think any great shakes of his civilised elder brother."

"And you'd marry a native?" queried Chris, amused.

Pamela lit a cigarette with her most deliberate and pontifical air. "I don't honestly know," she said. "Somehow it seems worse for a white woman to marry a black man than *vice versa*. Logically, I don't know why. I've met a white trader who lived with a native woman quite regularly, and both he and she were very decent people, though no one would go near them. I've met white men who lived with black women quite irregularly and both parties were rotters, though people did go near the men, and even appeared not to notice it. But I must confess I've never felt inclined to try the experiment."

"I should hope not," said Chris emphatically.

"Why?" she queried.

Chris smoked in silence. Then he laughed. "You have me," he said, "for I refuse to be conventional. To say it doesn't seem right and would injure the prestige of the white man, is a poor enough reason I know."

"Exactly," said Pamela. "Our prestige has been injured quite easily without that. When the impartial story of the white man in Africa comes to be written, a thousand years hence, it won't read over nicely. Slavery to begin with. Jameson's got-up little war in Rhodesia and the cool 'expropriation' of nine million acres. The suppression of the Herrera 'rebellion' in German West Africa. And so on. No, it won't make nice reading when the human race is welded into one and the colours are as mixed as the Goths, Celts, and Latins in Europe."

"That day will never come," said Chris.

"Won't it? You have small authority for saying so, anyway, my dear. But certainly we shan't see it, and meantime I'm for bed."

Chris got to his feet and knocked out his pipe on the stone step of the door. "Got all you want?" he queried.

"Everything, thanks. Shall you turn in now?"

"A last cigarette, I think. Good-night, Pam."

"Good-night, Chris."

He left the village, and found his tent beyond on a flat piece of grassy land. Ten yards away, it and the huts were all but swallowed in the darkness. He stood smoking and looking down the valley, which a rising moon lit in the distance though a black shadow lay over the village itself. It was utterly peaceful. He thought of Cecil and wondered what she was doing; then of Pamela, so unconventional and frank. They were a curious contrast. He sighed, and threw the glowing end of his cigarette into the black void at his feet. It shone in the air like a miniature meteor for a minute, and was gone. High overhead the real thing flamed in sudden glory across the velvet sky. Our day lasts no longer, he thought, in the story of the planet, and maybe our very world, when it goes out in the end, will seem no more to the inhabitants of some distant solar system. Then Philip loomed up out of the night. "What is it?" Chris demanded.

"Water for *morena,*" said Philip, and held out a native pot and his master's flask. "He have last drink, eh?"

"Have one yourself," said Chris, on the impulse.

The boy shook his head. "Brandy no good for Basuto," he said.

"Your people don't all think so," retorted Chris.

The boy's teeth grinned in the dark. "No, *morena,*" he said, "and it a great pity."

"You're right, Philip," said Chris, "but who taught you that?"

"The Mission. *Morena* see church at Mokhotlong. Priest there, these people say. He pass this way day before yesterday. Good-night, *morena.*"

Chris was still thoughtful as they rode next morning. The path crossed the Linakeng and left it at right angles, running due north again. They had to climb up a long valley, to ride round some peaks very high up, and then descend the course of another stream the other side. Philip pointed out a dis-

tant mountain mass. "That Mokhotlong, *morena,*" he said.

When he had dropped behind, Chris turned to Pamela. "Why does Philip call me *morena* now?" he asked. "It was always Baas before."

"Because he is a Mosuto," she said, "and in his own land drops the *baas* of the farm. The one means a chief, the other a master. It's a subtle difference, and just what I told you last night."

Chris nodded. "He's a good chap, that," he said, and told her of the brandy incident.

"Yes, better than most," Pamela replied. "Father picked him up in these parts, and he has never left him. We've a good lot of servants, and a mixed crowd too, of which I'm glad for it has taught me several dialects. You ought to learn one, Chris."

He shook his head. "I'm no good at that sort of thing," he said.

Mokhotlong is a Government camp, the smallest and most remote station in the Protectorate. It is magnificently placed, on a plateau that slopes to the Mokhotlong river itself, a deep mountain torrent which flows below the camp less than a mile away across the reserve and joins the Orange not far beyond under some huge cliffs. The settlement itself is a horseshoe of huts, with the sub-inspector's house at the end of them, a bungalow of three rooms built in native fashion with a couple of subsidiary rondhavels one on each flank. They rode up slowly in the afternoon sun, past the seven or eight rondhavels of the police, and the stables, and drew rein by a line of white stones that marked a terrace before the white man's quarters. As Chris helped Pamela to dismount, he came out, bare-headed but in uniform, and she uttered an exclamation.

"Mr. Mallory!" she cried. "Who would have thought of seeing you here!"

He smiled. "And who in the world of seeing you!" he retorted. "Well, at any rate, I congratulate you, Miss

Urfurd. Not more than three or four white women have ever got to Mokhotlong. But I thought you had gone home a week ago."

Chris and he shook hands heartily, and Chris explained. "But you," he added, "I thought you were off back to the Nek and civilisation."

"Well," said Mallory, "I saw the Sinclairs to Ramatseliso's, but there I found an orderly from the camp with an unexpected letter from Bosworth, our Assistant Commissioner you remember, telling me to come up here at once on a bit of police business. So I rode back to Moshebe's that night, and despite the rain, packed on up here next morning."

"We were hung up by the rain two days in the Bushman's cave," said Pamela. "We've had a topping time, Mr. Mallory. I hope you're not utterly shocked at seeing us ride up together."

"Not a bit," he said. "It's a thoroughly sporting programme. Come right in. I am alone, as a matter of fact, for our man up here is away on patrol and doesn't know of my arrival. It's all very rough and ready, Miss Urfurd, but I'm delighted to see you. Never mind the horses, Ashurst; the police will look after them; we'll have some tea in a couple of shakes. Do sit down, Miss Urfurd; you must be awfully tired. By Jove! it's perfectly priceless you two rolling up. You must stop a week at least."

"Oh we can't trespass on you like that," protested Pamela.

"Well, it isn't on me," said Mallory, laughing. "It's on Judson. But you needn't worry. We don't often get visitors here and we're delighted to see them. There's a store handy and sheep on the mountain, also buck, and fish in the river. There's a garden full of vegetables, and even the bar happens to be well stocked. You must rest your horses for some days anyhow, and where do you go next? Back to camp at Qacha's Nek?"

"We don't know," said Chris smiling. "The idea was simply not to waste the chance of the trek, but we're aiming

more or less for the Free State side. Can't we do Mont aux Sources now we're about it?"

The two men went off to the map hanging in the little office, and Pamela looked curiously about her. The floor and the walls were of mud; the table and chairs of unvarnished wood. A huge stone fire-place opened at one end, and above it was nailed the skin of an immense snake. There was a shelf of books with a dozen or so of novels, and "Every-man's Book of Medicine," and some law reports. These, a cupboard, and a half a dozen heads of various buck, together with a rack of rods and guns, completed the furniture. Pamela stretched her feet to the fire, and lay back in her chair with a sigh of content.

Mallory gave her the right rondhavel, and he and Chris shared the left. It was a curious life they lived together for the next few days. It did not matter in the least at what hour you rose, ate or slept. Mutton, in various forms, made up the greater part of the menu. The second day, however, while the men were out fishing, Pamela invaded the kitchen, charmed the native cook (who happened to be a fellow under arrest for manslaughter who was awaiting trial), and turned out scones, a cake and a tart. Thereafter she was voted house-keeper, and one night arranged a marvellous dinner such as, Mallory declared, the place could never have seen before. They even had a visitor from the lonely store three hours' ride away, and the four of them played auction bridge till midnight. Thus the days slipped away, but two incidents are really worthy of note.

The first was a visit to the mission. The three of them rode together across the Mokhotlong river and up a steep path to where, in a fold of the hills, stood the little church. It was a Sunday, and some couple of hundred natives were gathered, from tiny remote villages, to the spot. The priest came to meet them in his cassock, a red-haired slight man at whom Pamela looked curiously because at Three Springs little good was said of missions. She wondered what he would say to her appearance, in so lonely a place with two

men for one thing, and in riding breeches for the second. But she need not have wondered, for he did not seem to notice or criticise anything.

"Are you often here, father?" she asked when they had been introduced.

"No," he said. "Three or four times a year for say a week at a time is about all I can manage. I've all these mountains to visit, with perhaps a dozen more or less central places at which I try to spend a Sunday or two. The people are very scattered in the mountains, and it is a hard task to keep them up to scratch."

"But what a tiny village this is," she said, looking round on the eight or nine clusters of two or at the most three huts each which were scattered over the hollow.

"Ah, you are not used to our small mountain villages, but there are many all around. In the evening you can see the smoke of the fires far away down the valley. Some of these people here have come three hours on horseback to be present for mass, and some have actually walked. Won't you come up to the church and have a look? It's poor, but we are rather proud of it. It is so difficult to get anything built up here."

They crossed the rough stone-strewn grass to a mud, thatch and stone building like a big barn with a rounded apsidal end. The priest's hut, no different from those of his flock, stood by itself thirty feet or so beyond, and a great crowd of people clustered about. All were in their Sunday best and mostly in European clothes, the women hideous with masses of skirts which made them look as if they wore crinolines. Pamela drew the priest's attention to it.

"Yes," he said laughing, "it's terrible, isn't it? The fact is that the first white women they ever saw in Basutoland were the wives of French Protesant missionaries in the days of the crinoline. Fashions die hard in Africa. This is the native attempt to copy it. You can't dispossess them of the idea, and after all, it doesn't much matter. Personally I'd

sooner they came in native skins and blankets, but they're past that. It's not my fault, and I've more to do than worry over it. But come to the church, will you?"

The door was open and the visitors entered. A mud altar stood out from the wall in the apse, with a crucifix and a couple of candles upon it, and a picture of Saint Michael treading the devil down into very red flames hung above. ("The church is dedicated to St. Michael," said Fr. Wilfrid, "and that's the best we can do.") The floor was mud, with a few low mud seats running across it, but what at once attracted their attention was a small crowd of some twenty children kneeling around an image of the Virgin and saying the rosary. An elder girl, herself possibly thirteen or fourteen at most, led them, and scarcely a head turned on their entrance. They stood and listened, and presently Pamela distinguished the Gloria in the Sesuto. Then the leader began to sing, and the child voices took it up. They were singing the Salve Regina, set to a tune she knew well—"Hail, Gladdening Light," of the English hymn-book.

The simple devotion of the children, the utter spontaneity of it—for no one had known of their coming—affected Pamela very much, more indeed than she cared to allow. "How utterly beautiful," she whispered to the priest as they finished.

"Yes," he said tranquilly. "Our chief hope lies in the children."

They came out into the sun. Chris looked antagonistic, Pamela thought, and it was at once plain that she was right. "Forgive me," he said to the priest, "but I should have thought you had your work cut out to teach them about God without dragging in the Virgin."

Fr. Wilfrid smiled. "You are a Protestant, Mr. Ashurst," he said.

"I don't know that I am anything particularly," said Chris, "but that is how it strikes me."

"Well, then, Mr. Ashurst, you will at least allow that we

who believe Almighty God to have manifested Himself through a woman may be excused if we endeavour to continue His method."

Chris shook his head obstinately. "There's a flaw in that," he declared.

"I suppose you mean," said Fr. Wilfrid, "that that first manifestation was a unique action and is no more than an event past. But I do not wholly agree with you. God chose to avail Himself of the chief and most lovely law in His universe—that of Motherhood. He uplifted, ennobled and blessed it. Mary, like the rest of us, was immortal, but God, through her, has made motherhood divine. If we ever come to see God, Mr. Ashurst, we shall see His Mother by His side. He does not forget or change. Therefore, in herself, Mary has an eternal function, being the mother in a very real sense of all her Son's brethren, and 'He is not ashamed to call us brethren.' And even possibly more, she is an eternal star in our night. She shows us that motherhood is something with which God can have to do, and that in motherhood even the least of these poor African mothers can come near to Him."

Chris was at least honest. "We see things very differently, father," he said, "but I can at any rate understand that with such ideals, however vain to me, you can sacrifice your life to such a work as this. Still, if you set motherhood so high, why not set a good example and marry?"

"Ah no, Mr. Ashurst," the priest said quickly, "there is no sacrifice. Please do not say that. I would not exchange this hut and my old cassock for anything you might offer. Though I admit I could do with a new one," he added comically, glancing down at his patched robe. "But as for celibacy, why that is a matter of vocation. Surely you are the last person to blame us for imitating her Son!"

"There's another flaw in that too," declared Chris, but the priest said no more.

A little later they were shaking hands. Pamela lingered a moment, and the two men left her to walk towards the

horses. She held out her hand to the missionary with a folded note in it. "Take this for your work, father," she said, "if you please. And—and say a prayer for one who finds it hard to pray."

He thanked her courteously and glanced quickly at her face, seeming as if he would ask a question. But whatever he saw, he did not. "I will, Miss Urfurd," he said, "very gladly. And perhaps you will forgive me if I ask you to remember, should you need it at any time, that that Son and His Mother understand human hearts."

"Chris, you were almost rude," said Pamela as they rode home.

"Well," he burst out, "the whole thing annoyed me. Why come to Africa to teach new superstitions? Haven't Africans enough of their own? And this motherhood business is beyond me. It's a fact of nature, but there is no need to slobber over it."

"I thought so once," said Pamela.

"And not now?" he queried. "Surely the sight of a handful of brats saying Hail Marys isn't going to upset you!"

Pamela's face hardened. "There are moments, Chris," she said, "when you show yourself singularly dense. It appears to me that we have been set a lesson these last six months, and you haven't begun to learn the first syllable yet. And it's a pity; you may need it."

Then there was the day they went shooting. The police reported some buck on the mountain behind the station, and they all three went after them. It was hard work, but very glorious up there on a ridge of the world, the rolling miles of mountains, fantastic and majestic, all around them. At last, after a desperate stalk of half an hour just under a ridge, they came in sight of a herd, and each man selected his beast. Chris brought his down, but Mallory's dashed off wounded. For an hour or more they tracked it, and at last, in a little kloof, came suddenly on the creature, desperately wounded and unable to go farther or escape them. Mallory stepped quickly forward and fired, but not before Pamela

had seen its eyes turned on them with a look of terror and pain not easily forgotten.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "the poor beastie!"

"Yes," said Chris, looking down on it, "it's easy to be absurdly sentimental, but there are times when I hate myself for shooting."

Mallory sat down and spread out his legs. "Phew!" he said, "that's tiring; do sit down, Miss Urfurd."

Pamela sat down likewise, but still regarding the dead buck. "What a horror life is," she exclaimed impulsively. "How?" queried Mallory, looking at her under his heavy bushy eyebrows.

"Oh I can't exactly explain," said Pamela dreamily, "but it all came over me at the sight of that poor desperate thing. Think of it—the sudden, unexpected, unexperienced, unknown shock of the bullet; the pain; the blood; the wild dash for safety; its utter exhaustion; and then our incredibly awful appearance, hot with the blood lust, eager for its death. And it's a picture of life. Aren't we ourselves struck down again and again by just that sort of thing? Look at little Ronnie and Hugh and Cecil. Suddenly, out of the blue, the blow of fate. Or we are driven by what we do not know, we dash here and there to escape. We would give anything to get away, to avoid, but fate is hard on our heels—for no motive that we can see, and utterly merciless. Oh I know it is easy to be sentimental, as Chris says, and foolish, but that is life! There is not one of us who wholly escapes it. And some of us get caught in the toils and driven against our will and minds, to some such bloody end as this."

Chris, who had been standing looking at the dead buck, turned impulsively and threw himself on the ground by her side. Mallory sat on, regarding them both quizzically. He was a straightforward sort of person in a practical straightforward sort of job, but he was by no means without some sort of understanding for these two who were neither of them in the least usual. He half expected Chris's outburst.

"And yet you can talk about God, Pamela, and mother-

hood, and all the rest of it! Can't you see how sickening it all is by the side of reality? Of course simple primitive folk find some sort of consolation in such tales, but we moderns, who see so much more clearly and who have had the pretty delusions smashed fairly extensively about us, know better. That's why the modern man is a rebel. He knows that there is no god in heaven or earth or under the earth but himself, and he only god in his own hour and right if he masters himself, sees his own pleasures and ends, and moves relentlessly towards them. We shot this poor beast who has done us no harm and was as glad of its life as we were, simply for an hour's amusement and perhaps, secondarily, for an unnecessary flavour in to-night's pot. It's damnable, put like that. But the damnation does not rest on us. It rests on whatever blind power, in whatever fit of drunken madness, made the world. Nor is there any clue to any escape. Therefore, since we are masters, since we, for example, have been able to make such a deadly foul thing as this rifle, let us walk through the world around and kill our fill. And at the last, if there be a throne of judgment before which we must stand, well, we will laugh in the face of God and tell Him He is welcome to break and torture the poor devil that He Himself was brute enough to make!"

His fierce invective wrought absolutely the opposite effect from what he probably expected in both his hearers. A rather sad smile gathered on Pamela's face. "You're rather a dear, Chris," she said, heedless of Mallory, "but there is no escape from the trap by that road."

And then Mallory showed them suddenly a side of his character not often seen. "The matter with you, Ashurst," he said, "is that you've seen a lot of life, but only one side of it. You are not a father. Wait till you see your wife with her first baby in her arms. Then say your say of God and His universe."

Chris was most lovable in that he could take a defeat and admit it. So now he looked at the speaker for awhile in silence, and then got slowly to his feet. "A month ago,

Mallory," he said in a subdued voice, "I should have laughed at you. But by God—though I do not know Him—there may be something in what you say."

As for Pamela, she hardly spoke all the long road home.

CHAPTER V

THE three of them became great friends in the ten days or so they eventually spent at Mokhotlong, and when Pamela declared it was time for Chris and herself to continue their trek, Mallory offered to accompany them part of the way. The need of patrolling the Border up to Mont aux Sources could be made excuse for doing so, and thus the three of them set off together. It was a queer companionship. In a sense the long days together remote from the world, made Chris and Pamela both forget for a while the interwoven story of life in which they had their parts to play, each surrendering to the moment and allowing Mallory's ignorance of so much of that story to serve as a protection. To him they were simply unconventional cousins, and Cecil no more than the friend of both of them. They had perforce to hide from him knowledge of the rest, and in so doing lapsed easily into a frank friendship. But out of that very friendship something else grew in Pamela's case, grew against the day when they were once more alone together for, as it were, the last act in the drama.

Mont aux Sources had been visited, and a night spent in "The Eagle's Nest." Then, after a consultation with a sergeant of native police who knew the country well, the three had ridden west until they struck a broad trail running north and south in its lonely way across those upland solitudes. Here they drew rein. "There you are," said Mallory. "I go south, and this road will land me at Mokhotlong again; you ride north, and you will find it veer west in an hour or two and bring you out at the summit of the Moteng. You should be there soon after mid-day. Then, if you like, you can make a store for the night, or

else sleep at the foot of the Pass and make Butha-Buthe the next day. Butha-Buthe is a couple of hours only from the railway and you could if you wish catch the night train. Or else ride on south to Leribe—it's a road worth seeing—and catch the train the day after at Ficksburg."

"Sure you can't come?" queried Chris.

"No," said the other, shaking his head. "It's all right up here and I'm in my own district still, but you'll see what the Pass is like. One doesn't go up or down it just for fun. And once down, I'm trespassing in another district and should have to give a reason why."

"Am I not good enough reason?" laughed Pamela.

"I fear not, Miss Urfurd," said Mallory smiling. "If we could make away with Ashurst now, then I should have to escort you home, but as it is . . ."

"You see what a nuisance you are, Chris," said she.

So they had parted, and now at mid-day the cousins stood dismounted at the lip of the great Pass. It was, indeed, a wonderful sight. The tiny trail slipped out of sight below them between two towering bastions that rose, one on either side, as if on guard, and they had literally to crane over to see it winding among the stones for the first thousand feet of the precipitous descent. Thence, the Pass widened out like a funnel. Spikes of rock, each crag hundreds of feet high, rose from below, with other bastions, peaks and foothills among which nestled at last the little river that owed its existence to the hundred tiny springs bubbling up in this split mountain gorge. Away and away in the Free State, across lower Basutoland, which, from this height looked no more than a flat plain, other mountains rose on the horizon, the sun gleaming golden on them so that they looked like a Promised Land. Between, in one place, a storm was in progress. The plane of their sight was far above that of the clustering black clouds which, to those beneath them, would have seemed to be all but the entire sky, and they could watch the rods of falling rain. Intense stillness hemmed them in. The boys were a mile or so behind, and

only a little wind sang gently among the great rocks and stirred the long grasses.

They stood side by side, their horses grazing a few yards away. And for some minutes neither spoke. Each was realising that their mountaineering was all but at an end; that the respite was over; that down below lay the world of life and the stage upon which they had each a part to play. Pamela thought fiercely of the start, now weeks before, on that other side behind them, and of her plot to save Cecil; and she realised suddenly how much more had come of it than she had intended. In a few hours they would be below again, and what then? She felt as if she had been dreaming these last few days, but was awake again at last. Of what was Chris thinking? What was, after all, to be the end?

Her eyes narrowed as she stood there gazing, and her mouth hardened a little. Had she yet saved Cecil? And what about herself?

"Twenty-four hours, Chris," she said, "and as like as not we'll be in the train. Can you realise it?"

He shook his head, still silent.

"What are your plans, old boy?" she asked.

He did not reply at once, and then Socratic fashion. "Pam," he demanded suddenly, "do you think I can return to Cecily yet?"

Pamela heard but did not look at him. She swept that great expanse below her, and time seemed to stand still as it will at a crisis. Characteristically, it was in that moment that she made up her mind, indeed in that moment she saw her own mind clearly for the first time since they had set out together. She knew, then, her deeper purpose, and how it merged with her promise to Cecil. She surveyed the lists, and knew them to be set for the last encounter. And it was not in Pamela to fight with gloved hands.

"I must think, Chris," she said. "I'll tell you later. Let's get on down. The boys are coming, and we had better be well ahead of the packs."

Scrambling, slipping, shouting at the horses, panting for breath and now and again resting in temporary exhaustion, they descended. They had to negotiate three thousand feet of mountain side as steep as it is possible to get a Basuto pony up or down, and what exactly that means has to be experienced to be realised. It was well on in the afternoon before they reached a bit of open ground at the mouth of a little kloof and saw by the track ahead that it was possible to mount their horses there. A stream flowed at their feet, and another purred down from the kloof to meet it. Pamela threw herself on the ground and laved her hands in the water. It was quite hot down there, although it had been cold enough on the top.

"Well?" she queried.

Chris looked round and smiled. "Yes," he said. "I take it that the committee is agreed. There may very likely be a store three hours on; I can quite believe it; but it can stay there comfortably without our bothering it. I vote we camp our last night right here."

"Carried," said Pamela, "only I propose we pitch the tents a bit up that kloof so as to be away from the road."

There was the usual hour's bustle, but at last nothing more remained to be done but to wait for the dinner to finish cooking. The two tents stood close to each other in a little semicircle of bush, and in the centre of its chord burned the fire. Saddles had been piled out of sight where the boys would sleep, away among the bushes to the right and in the lee of the side of the krantz. The two whites were sitting on a blanket by the clear purling water, dealing, as is fitting at the close of the day, with sundowners and tobacco.

Chris himself opened the conversation. "Pam," he said, "I can't forget that day we visited the Mission, and our talk when we had shot the buck. What do you honestly make of life? We're going back to it now, and there is still in my mind what you forced me into saying that day.

I begin to wonder if things do really look to me exactly as they once looked. But I can't straighten them out at all."

"How precisely do you mean?" Pamela asked him slowly.

Chris moved restlessly. "Oh," he said, "I know I put it badly then, and I know I can't put it very much better now. But it comes to this, Pam: I'm going back to Cecil to persuade her to rebel, to break laws, to strike out as an individualist, and I know she will agree and rebel with me. But all these weeks up in these mountains I've been wondering more and more if—well, if perhaps there isn't more in things than I've allowed. Up here there are no trappings or fripperies in nature. It's all gaunt and huge and nude. I get a kind of fear as I think of it. It's not merely conscience, of which I don't think I have much. But one might dash oneself to pieces against these rocks, and they would not care. The Power that set them here would not be moved. The eternal plans and purposes would go on working themselves out. It comes to this: *Can* one rebel? Is not rebellion no more than a mad kind of suicide? Can one rebel, Pam?"

Pamela rolled over on to her chest and stared up at him with an almost savage look in her eyes. "One can," she said huskily.

He glanced at her curiously. "What do you mean?" he asked in his turn.

"Some of us are not made to submit, Chris," she said. "We're born rebels. I see what your mountains mean and say to you, but a fig for them! Man is the master of things. I see that some submit; more are driven to submit; some are born under the law and stay there; but some are not. I am not. You are not."

"And Cecil?" he inquired, under her spell.

Pamela shrugged her shoulders. Then she stretched out a hand and placed it on his arm. "Does that matter just now?" she whispered softly.

He made no reply, but she felt a quiver pass through him, and she went on speaking intensely. "Chris, listen to me. There's so much that one doesn't know and can't know, and surely it is only the cowards who fear what they do know for the sake of what they do not. And I don't fear to tell you what I know, Chris, know about myself and know about you. We're both rather primitive people, Chris, passionate folk, eh, my dear? The conventions don't appeal to us much. They were framed for the soft people and the cowards. It's in revolt, in passion, in fierce things, that joy lies for you and me. Aren't we alike in that, Chris?"

The man beside her moved his arm that he might take her hand, and he drew her a little towards him. The movement, slight as it was, broke down the last barrier of her restraint, and with the fierceness of a wild thing she sought to make him her own. Yes, sought, though she lay still on the ground and the colour ebbed from her face, and left her eyes, narrowed and burning, to glow at him out of her white skin.

"Yes we are," she cried in a torrent of speech, "and that is why I can talk to you instead of waiting like some soft drawing-room girl for you to talk to me. Chris, I love you—why I don't know, but as I think you have never been loved and never will be again. I love *you*—not marriage, not children, not a position, but just you. You need not marry me—I'll go round the world with you as your mistress; you need give me no child, though if you like I will bear you children; but give me love, Chris, feed the flame in me, meet the need in me, satisfy yourself with me, Chris, and so give me the satisfaction that I want. When you have done with me, say so; I shall know what to do. But love is the reality of life, Chris, and Chris, Chris, give me love!"

Chris bent over her, and caressed her cheek with his hand. But he did not even kiss her. Emotion was rising in him like a flood, and the stirrings of desire as the

thought grew steadily in his own consciousness that this woman was his, there and then, if he cared to take her; but the very strangeness of this love-making seemed to make the conventional signs of it unnecessary and foolish. And as he caressed, she continued. "Have you never seen these natives talk together? I have, a hundred times. Chris, I've wished before now that I could be as free as they. Why the man scarcely woos the girl at all! He sees her, he desires her, and he orders her to follow him. And as a rule she goes. There's something fine in it. It is afterwards that arrangements are made and their little rules and conventions of life come in. But it is that wild rapture of living that I want, and want now from you, Chris. Let's turn and go back the way we've come! Not to the Camp, but back to the mountains, back to our cave, back to the clean air and water and grass. Don't let's go back to drawing-rooms and cities, Chris. Will you? Do you hate me? Can't you be glad in me, Chris?"

Before he could reply, there was a sound in the bushes of some one's approach, and he had scarcely time to withdraw his hand when Philip stepped out. "Dinner ready, *morena*," he said, utterly unconscious of the bathos, and smiled at them and turned away. Chris caught his breath and leaped to his feet, and Pamela rose to hers. So they stood, looking each other for a second or two in the face. Then a smile gathered slowly in the girl's, and frankly and impulsively she held out her hands. "Well?" she queried, "am I impossible, Chris?"

Passion flared up in him. He ignored her hands, but caught her by the shoulders and drew her to him fiercely. "God! no, Pamela," he exclaimed. "You offer all you have to give and do you think I don't love you for it? See, I thank you—so," and he kissed her hard upon the lips. "There, I take that, but more I will not take—not now at any rate, and I think never. For I can't turn back. If I took all that you offer me—and I love you, savage woman that you are, for offering it—then I would indeed turn back.

I could not help it. We would wander off together, Pamela, you and I." He laughed. "God, Pam, it would be great! You tempt me! But I won't. I go on."

"Why, Chris?" she begged, her heart faint within her.

"Why?" he queried, still holding her, "why? Because I've looked on Eve, I suppose," he said, "and she was made for me."

For Pamela, time hung still. Then she mastered herself and it, as few could have done. "Let's eat," she said laughing a little. "I'm actually hungry and that's another primitive passion."

They walked arm in arm to the fire for the last stew of the trek, and Chris doled it out, Pamela watching him. They ate at first in silence, but then she said: "I'm not a bit sorry we had that scene, Chris. A barrier is down between us. I'm even happier to-night than I've been any night before."

"You're a queer person, Pam," he replied; "why?"

"Because we don't pretend any more. Because we shan't surprise each other any more. Because I know you better now, and you me. And because I love you, I'm glad of all these things. When we've finished supper, we'll sit together on a rug and talk of life and prospects of life, shall we?"

Chris was a little piqued. She appeared to take it so easily. "Do you really love me, Pam?" he asked. "If you do, how can you talk so lightly of the future?"

Pamela tipped off a mug of tea and put it down. She spoke easily, but her hand shook a little. "Oh yes, I love you, Chris," she said. "Look here, my offer stands. It stands till we part. Isn't that proof enough?"

"Are you flesh and blood at all, Pam?" he asked slowly. "Do you know how you tempt me?"

"I don't," she said, and dared to smile in the firelight. "There's a stronger than I."

He moved uneasily, and Pam noted it. She chuckled

to herself, her face hidden. The battle was not yet over. She was stronger for her very defeat.

So in the glow of the dying fire, they sat together. Chris put his arms about her and she leaned against him, though she made no other movement to attract his caresses. "Tell me what you will do when you get back," he asked curiously.

"Seek out Nanea," said Pamela promptly, "and make her speak again. I've dabbled before in the thing; I shall plunge right in now. I shall see what I can do with Auntie Tot, and this boy Philip, I fancy. What shall you do?"

"Go on to Jo'burg and the Northern Transvaal, and then back to Kokstad. Shall I come and visit you on the way?"

"Oh no," said Pamela.

Chris frowned in the dark. He felt himself slighted again. "Why not?" he asked, kicking the embers into a sudden spurt of flame.

"I will keep my memories," said Pamela.

Chris stroked her hand. "Oh my dear," he said, "I'm so sorry."

"You need not be," said Pamela. "What is, is. I think if one only rebels it does not matter so much if rebellion be unsatisfactory. But you will end by drifting with the stream. Life will hold you, despite your will. Probably you'll end in a London suburb with a host of children. But not I. Adam and Eve bowed to the inevitable, and they ended by fighting thistles for their daily bread. The Arabs say Lilith wandered into Africa and died in Kilimanjaro, where natives worship at her grave to this day. Perhaps, in a hundred years, they will be worshipping my remains in some cave in Pondoland. No, in my own cave. It doesn't matter. It's as good an end as any."

"And if we went back together?" queried Chris.

The girl grew still in his arms. "Well?" he repeated.

"I do not know," she said. "That road is eastward at least, towards the sun."

Chris touched her hair with his lips. "Witch," he whis-

pered, "you tempt me. I do not know my own mind to-night."

And then Pamela made a mistake. "That is not like you, Chris," she said. "You knew it clearly enough in Kokstad."

A log fell in the fire and sparks shot up. Chris loosened her arm. "By God, I did," he said in a changed voice. "Thank you for reminding me, dear. That was daylight. Let's to bed."

But he kissed her as they parted for the night, and no kiss is without significance. In his tent, it was Pamela who filled his thoughts, and in hers, Pamela lay very long staring upwards at the canvas above her.

The next day they reached the camp of Butha-Buthe, riding up the steep cross-country path, past the Residency garden and the police huts at the top of the hill, and drawing rein in the little street with its three stores and one other European house and the veld stretching wide and free behind and before.

Butha-Buthe welcomed them in the fashion of the country. Chris went up to the magistrate's office to inquire the way, and found a short, prematurely rather grey-haired man who was very courteous and plainly delighted to see him. He asked how far they had come that day and absolutely refused to let them go on. He walked with them across the road to his house, sent the boys and horses to the stables, and introduced them to his wife. While tea was preparing, he insisted on giving Chris a whisky and soda, and his wife took Pamela to her room. She was a short dark-haired attractive girl whom Pamela plainly impressed.

"You must have had a perfectly thrilling time," she said. "I wish I could do something like that. But I've got babies, you know. They finish you."

"How many?" queried Pamela, amused.

"Two, both girls, and rather dears—you shall see them. And how long have you been on trek?"

Pamela told her. "Aren't you scandalised at my going alone with Chris?" she asked.

"Heavens, no!" exclaimed the other. "Jolly sporting, I call it. Besides he was introduced as your cousin. Isn't he?"

"A little distant," said Pamela smiling, and to see what she would say.

"Well, make him a first to my husband," the girl said. "He's rather proper really. Personally, I should have gone with him if he had been no relation at all. I've read his novels, and I could not have resisted it."

"Don't tell Chris," said Pamela. "He's quite conceited enough already, though he does hide it rather nicely."

So they had tea on the stoep, and then wandered in the rose-garden and admired a new pergola; and Pamela watched the babies bathed and was not at all sure that she would not have given a good deal for two herself. And then, after dinner, they played auction while the crickets cried in the roses, and under the willows, below the garden, the frogs croaked in the little stream.

The magistrate had a trap, and in the morning insisted on offering it to them. He and Chris had a consultation, and it ended in the boys and horses being left there to rest, thence to be sent back by the direct road in ten days' time. The trap was brought round about eleven, and not without much pressing to stay another day (or another week) they climbed into it. It was explained that at Fouriesburg they must lunch, and get a taxi later on to the station some miles distant from the dorp. Then the train would take them both to Ladysmith, where Chris would change in the early hours for the Johannesburg mail, and Pamela, by sitting still, get finally to Durban in the afternoon. Philip and Motseke came up for good-byes. Philip begged Chris, to whom he had taken a fancy, to come up to Three Springs and arrange another trek, and Motseke talked at length in Sesuto.

"What does he say?" Chris demanded.

Pamela had the grace to blush, seeing there was company listening, but Mrs. Magistrate, who had overheard, was highly amused. She glanced round and saw that her husband was out of earshot. "He says, Mr. Ashurst, that if you and Missus set up house together, here or anywhere, you must be sure to send for him!"

Pamela recovered. She shot a glance at Chris, and said to her new friend: "That wasn't all."

It was the other's turn to look a little confused. "He says he's good with babies, Chris," said Pamela.

"You are an awful pair," laughed their hostess. "Get in, for goodness' sake. Good-bye, but come again and stay a decent time."

"The voice of Basutoland—'Good-bye, but come again,'" said Chris as they drove off. "Heavens, Pam, but they're a jolly set."

It was not to be wondered at that both of them found it hard to be cheerful on the way to the station. An experience not likely to repeat itself was over, and each had personal reflections to make on it. The day, even, was cloudy, and Fouriesburg is of all places the most depressing at any time. Presently, over the veld, the hideous red and white brick towers of its Dutch Reformed Church came into view, and at length they drove down the deserted street. At the hotel, a sleepy waiter thought they could have luncheon in an hour and told them that a car would be going to the station in which they could have seats. There was nothing to do during the hour but wander about among the stores and bungalows and speculate as to what man did in such a place. By meal time, however, things looked more cheerful, for a dozen of young Dutchmen were drinking in the bar and there was a car or two before the hotel stoep. But the meal itself was a feeble performance, and when Chris said that he wished Philip was serving them a stew in the Moteng Pass, Pamela felt that she wanted to get up and cry.

At the little station they had not long to wait, and the

conductor had had their wire and reserved them a coupé. Once in, and their little baggage stowed away, they watched the distant mountains in the dying light, till stars twinkled over the veld and it was time to dine.

The dining car was cheerful, and its lights roused them. Chris insisted on champagne as a fitting climax, and they got back to their compartment pleasantly stimulated. A half-caste knocked at the door. "Beds, sir?" he queried.

Chris looked at Pamela and laughed. "Shall I tell him to make up two?" he demanded.

Pamela glanced from him to the waiting boy with a flicker of amusement in her face. "No," she said, *sotto voce,* "we can't now, Chris. Anybody might be on the train."

Chris shrugged his shoulders. "'Is Saul also among the prophets?'" he quoted good-humouredly. Then to the boy, "Make up one"; and to Pamela: "Come on; let's stand in the corridor while he does it."

Outside Pamela gravely selected a coin. "Toss you for the bed," she said.

He shook his head. "Oh no. We go back to the conventions, I see, so of course it's yours."

"Well, what will you do?"

"Get another place, I suppose."

"What's next door?"

It proved to be the other half of their coupé, and empty. "By Jove, what huge luck!" cried Chris. "Here, boy, shove a second bed in here."

There was a door between the two compartments, and when the lights in both were on and their goods divided and the doors on to the corridor shut, a sense of isolation and of their own proximity descended upon them such as they had not had even on trek. In the mountains, it had seemed far less strange, far less provocative, that they should sleep near each other. Here, in civilisation, each dressed accordingly, there was a new sensation to face. Pamela's heart beat fiercely. She had hoped for this, but she herself had scarcely realised what it would mean.

They chatted desultorily, and at Bethlehem got out to walk the platform during the few minutes' wait. "Have some coffee?" asked Chris, and Pamela consented. They were served in the little refreshment room, and then, arm in arm, walked the length of the station in the dark, back through the lights of the central portion, and out into the dark beyond again.

"Did you see anyone you knew?" queried Chris.

"Not one," said Pamela, "but I'll look again."

So they strolled back. The passengers, mostly men, were grouped at the doors of the compartments or strolling about as they themselves were doing, but they recognised none. When the whistle blew, they re-entered the carriage with that sense of loneliness which is only to be obtained among unknown human faces.

"Have a nightcap with me, Pam," said Chris, and got out his flask.

The swaying train rocked through the night and their glasses chinked. "Here's to you, dear," he said, and she smiled her reply.

Then a cigarette; and constraint settled upon them in some measure. "Let's go and look at the night before we turn in," suggested Pamela.

So they stood together, arm in arm, on the creaking cab of the carriage. The stars shone down peacefully on the black veld, big and sparkling and unclouded, and the two watched in silence.

"Say something, Pam," said Chris.

"What am I to say?" she asked softly.

"Say you've enjoyed yourself," he demanded foolishly.

"I've enjoyed myself very much, thank you Christopher," she said.

His hand tightened on her arm, and she glanced up at him in the feeble light of the poor lamp that burned above their heads. Their eyes met, and something ran through his veins like fire. She looked delectably feminine, and he had scarcely noticed just that trait before. Her hair

escaped from the little hat and her lips were parted slightly.

"Oh, Pam," he exclaimed with sudden realisation, "we shall never have this again."

She made no reply, but his own heart questioned why not? Why not consummate the journey and their relationship? Why not carry both on indefinitely? Why not go back to their silent compartment with that unlocked door between, and gather her into his arms and drink her love? He knew well enough she would not refuse. Fate thrust his happiness into his hands; should he finally reject it? And the train raced over its iron way and roared through the night.

"Let's go back," he whispered, and hardly knew his own voice.

The corridor door was shut. He took her in his arms. "Chris," she whispered. He bent his lips to hers, and so they stayed, locked for a moment in an embrace. He released her. "I've been a fool these weeks," he heard himself say.

Pamela raised her hands and took off her hat deliberately. She placed it on the rack and turned back to him. "Go and change. Chris," she said, but she did not meet his eyes. "Don't shut the door; let's talk while we undress."

They talked—fragments of stupid sayings while all the while something hammered in his ears and desire tingled in his body. "Isn't it hard to undress in a carriage?" she said.

"Yes," he called back, "but harder for me than for you."

"Why?"

"Oh trousers—terrible things to get off."

A ripple of laughter. "We've got as bad; sit on your bunk."

"Can't. I knock my head. There!—I've done it!"

"Poor old thing," she replied. "Shall I come and rub it?"

"Half a moment. I'm just getting into my pyjamas."

He reached for them, a new folded pair among the clean linen kept for this final stage of the journey. And as he

took them down, a tiny crumpled handkerchief slipped out and fell to the floor. He stooped for it—ridiculous in his shirt—and fumbled for the corner and the initials. There was suddenly a mist before his eyes. He remembered his finding it while packing at Kokstad, and his not returning it. Yes, there they were. "C. S."

Pamela slipped on a soft embroidered night-gown, hung by ribbons on the shoulders, transparent at the breast. She, too, had been reserving this. She glanced at herself in the little glass, and considered a minute. He was very quiet. Then she made up her mind and slipped between the sheets. "Aren't you ready?" she called. "What an age you are!"

Chris started. "Yes, I'm nearly ready," he said, and deliberately he raised the fragment of lace to his lips.

Pamela heard his movements. She was trembling ever so slightly. In a moment he would come—some excuse perhaps, even now, like a man—but then . . . She closed her eyes.

Then she heard the sound of his sheets, and unmistakably that he was getting into his own bunk, there, behind the partition, but a partition with an open door not two paces from her.

The train rolled on through the night.

"Good-night, Pam," he called.

A flash of anger swept through her, but she controlled her voice. Her brain worked swiftly. "You're never in bed!" she called back. "Oh, Chris, I want a cigarette and I thought you would light it for me, and you must turn out my light. I can't get up now. I thought you would."

"I'm sorry," he replied. "I'll come."

Quickly she pushed the bed-clothes a little farther off her and pulled a shade looser the ribbon at her breast. Barefoot, in his pyjamas, he came through the open door, smiling. Her heart leapt. Surely, at last . . .

He bent over the bed. His eyes took in the slightly flushed face, her bare arms and neck, the flesh but half concealed

beneath the soft open cambric. "You lazy old thing," he said, and held out a cigarette.

She sat up, rosy, but deliberate. But she did not want a cigarette. Was he blind?

He produced a box of matches and struck one. The tiny flame burned between them and he held out his hand. She put the little tube of tobacco between her lips and leaned forward. His hand rested on her throat; she could see, and so must he, where now the laces fell forward from her breasts. She drew in the smoke.

"There!" he exclaimed, blowing out the match, and kissed her gently on the forehead. "Good-night, my dear. Shall I switch off the light now for you? Sleep sound!"

"Yes," she said, and wondered that she could say it calmly. "Good-night, Chris."

The switch clicked, and he climbed back into his own bed. In a moment his coupé too was dark, and in the dark, so near and yet so separate, these two fought a last round.

She stared into the blackness above her. She would not speak. But she willed him back, desperately, and now and again she heard him move and knew that he did not sleep. Why? why? why?—she queried again and again. Surely, on the cab outside, victory had lain with her. Surely that little futile conversation, and that note in his voice the while, had meant that victory lay with her. And now?

Once she actually sat up to go to him. But her pride rebelled at that. After all that had been said and done, this she could not do. She would wait half an hour at least, and she began to count the minutes. That was fatal. She was worn out with excitement though she hardly realised it; the train rocked her to a rough lullaby; she slept.

Chris did not. He lay and fought the beasts at Ephesus. He had never so fought before. Even the image of Cecil, conjured up in his mind, was scarcely strong enough, and lest he should prove too weak, he rose silently at last and dressed. Out in the night air, he grew more cool. He

reviewed the days and night past, saw again their camp-fires, questioned more surely his own heart. And when the lights of Ladysmith shone out in the night, he knew that he would go to Cecil unashamed.

The Johannesburg train was in. He gathered his things quietly and looked round the open door at Pamela. In the faint morning light he could just see her, and that she still slept. He did not dare enter, and he softly closed the door.

They bring round tea at 6 a. m., and Pamela started awake with the voice of an Indian waiter at the window in her ears. Ladysmith? The Johannesburg train must have gone then! "Chris!" she called, hopelessly. Then she put the cup on the little table by her side, and rolled over in her bed, her face to the wall.

CHAPTER VI

IT was hot among the plantations below the farm at Springfontein, but Gwen thought as she walked that it was all very lovely. Above, glimpsed through the screen of boughs and leaves, the sky stretched out infinitely in one deep unflecked transparent blue, so that, as you looked up, you seemed to be staring into the great untroubled depths of some unsailed ocean. The green woods about seemed to crouch at rest as if their separate growths had merged into one living breathing sentient creature. A faint perfumed sweetness of gums and mosses rose all about her, and she moved idly and dreamily through it, her mind content to rest. A maple ring-dove flew suddenly into an immense weeping-willow before her with a great stir of wings, settling beside its drowsy mate and bursting out into its triumphant cry. The hen, plainly visible to Gwen, just turned her head and looked at him, and the other broke off with, as it were, a sudden self-conscious bashfulness. Gwen smiled to herself. It was exactly as if the bird had said sleepily to her mate: "Oh do be quiet. This isn't Spring, and can't you see that everybody is trying to rest?"

The next minute she espied Hugh. He was lying on the ground, face downwards, beneath that very willow, half curtained by its long green sweeping tendrils and twigs, and he was as still as everything about him. His face was hidden in his left arm, and his right was stretched out in front of him. She wondered if he was asleep, as Cecil was in her hammock on the stoep, and she thought with a little amusement that if she went and lay down beside him silently and slept too, then he would find her so on awakening. But she dismissed the idea; she was not quite sure of Hugh these

days; he was so silent. So she took a few careful steps intending to pass him by, and would have done if she had not caught a low sound and noticed a tremor run through his body as he lay.

She stood stock still. The male ring-dove, regarding her inquisitively, decided that there was no more energy in this human this hot afternoon than in his mate, and he sidled a step nearer that fat bundle of grey feathers, preened his tail for a few seconds, gaped deliberately, and settled himself by her again. There was not another sound. "Hugh," whispered Gwen at last.

The man started and looked quickly up. "You here," he said inconsequently. Gwen walked softly across to him. "I thought you were asleep," she said.

"No," he replied, half sitting up.

"Don't move," she said, sitting down beside him, choosing meticulously a soft spot and brushing aside a couple of sticks. The lady ring-dove, whose feathers had drawn tightly about her head as the girl moved, giving her a startled expression, decided it was all right and fluffed them out again. Her mate blinked one eye, and closed it contemptuously.

"Isn't it hot," said Hugh, dropping his head once more, but this time sideways so that he could see her.

"Delicious," she said. And again, "Don't move." She leaned back against a tree, and stared down the glade ahead of her. In the distance she could just catch a glimpse of the white road up to the farm. That thread of dusty white fascinated her. Up it Hugh and Cecil had driven once, she imagined, when he brought her as his bride to the farm; up it Christopher Ashurst had come riding into their lives; up it, not so many weeks ago, they had brought little Ronnie home for the last time. She wondered what next would turn its dust, coming to the farm. Or who down it, going whither? And at that she reached out restlessly for a little stick, and broke it nervously into pieces in her brown hands.

Hugh watched her. "That's how my life has broken," he said harshly.

Gwen started. Then she almost smiled. It was so unlike Hugh to make parables of little things and moralise over them. But even as it struck her how unlike it was, she could as suddenly have wept. Indeed the hot tears burnt already in her eyes. "Don't, don't, Hugh dear," she cried.

The sweet hot silence fell on her words and buried them, as it were, before either of them spoke again. Then: "And I've been a beast to you," said Hugh.

His words were again so unexpected by her that not only did they take her utterly by surprise, but they stabbed her too. She paled suddenly under her tan and bit her lip. Then she turned her head fearlessly and looked at him. "Oh no, Hugh," she said, "fortune of war, that's all."

Their eyes met. She did not flinch even then, and the man reached out his hand and laid it upon hers as it supported her, palm downwards on the ground. "You brave little girl," he said quietly.

Gwen twisted her fingers over and for a moment or two they locked tightly in his. Then she withdrew them. Not another word on that subject, then or later, did either ever say. It was like them both.

When the silence was broken again, it was Gwen who spoke, and she took up his first sentence as if the second had not been added. "Don't say that, Hugh," she said. "Life is not broken as one breaks a stick you know. It means a new beginning, that is all."

The man sat up. "Perhaps," he said quietly, "but when one is married it means that two have to make that beginning."

"Well," said Gwen lightly, "begin again with Cecil."

"Can I?" queried Hugh.

Gwen's heart leapt momentarily and then seemed to stop still. The very quiet of his question startled her so much. It suggested that he had quite definitely decided on the answer. And her mind began to race down the track of time, through the incidents of their trek, back to the coming of Ashurst. She lingered on that. Then, slowly, she

began to recall it all again, dwelling on this and that, piecing a story together that she had not seen as a whole until now. The moments of silence lengthened. She wished, fiercely, that she had answered at once; now, what could she say? She realised at last that truthfully she could not answer at all. And yet she had not consciously, even in her own mind, settled upon anything. But she knew she dared not attempt a settlement.

From far away came the sound of horse-hoofs. Faint in the distance, it was Hugh who first heard and turned his head to listen. Gwen caught the look on his face and listened too. The sound grew near unmistakably. "Some one coming," said Hugh unnecessarily.

"Let's go and see who it is," said Gwen, glad of the excuse to move.

They got up together and moved down the woody path towards the road. As they emerged, they saw how the heat danced upon it, and they hesitated, in the fragrant shade, to step out into the sun. Fifty yards or so lower down, there was a corner, and they stood to watch for the rider to round it. The horse was cantering easily and they had some seconds to wait. Gwen caught herself wondering again at that fateful road, and stared eagerly out into the sun. Then round the corner came Pamela Urfurd.

Gwen shot a quick glance at Hugh. He was frowning ever so slightly. "Pamela!" he muttered. The girl slipped a hand into his arm.

Pamela had seen them now, and waved. Hugh lifted his hat as she rode up and reined in her horse. "Hullo!" she cried, "you two!"

"Good afternoon, Miss Urfurd," said Hugh courteously. "Where in the world have you sprung from?"

She glanced from one to the other and smiled down on them. "That's a long story," she said, "but the bits that matter most just now are that I found father busy at Durban arranging for the publication of his book, and as I felt I hated Durban I thought I'd go home. But on the very sta-

tion I began to feel that I hated home too and couldn't go off there alone without seeing you and Cecily, so I came on here instead. I thought you'd put me up for a night or two. I've got a little luggage coming on a wagon that was leaving Kokstad for you, Mr. Sinclair, but I said I'd ride and I got this beastie at the hotel. Where's Cecil? How is she?"

"Rather limp," said Hugh, "but you'll find her up at the house. Do ride on. We'll follow. I'm sure you want tea."

"I do," confessed Pamela. "All right. I'll ride on and take her by surprise. Up, beauty."

She shook her rein and was off again, riding easily as she had come. Little spurts of dust rose from her horse's hoofs and she did not look back. The two stood and watched her go. "I wonder why she's come," said Hugh, hardly aware that he spoke aloud.

And for the second time that afternoon Gwen felt he had asked a question she could not answer.

Pamela drew up at the farm and hesitated. No one was visible, and in the heat the place seemed asleep. She leant out of the saddle, and lifted the latch of the garden gate with her riding whip. Inside, she turned her horse adroitly, and closed as she had opened it. Then she walked him round to the front stoep. Cecil at last heard the horse-hoofs and started up in her hammock. "Pam!" she cried.

Her friend jumped lightly to the ground, drew her bridle over her horse's head, and slipped it over the gate-post of the entrance to the stoep. Pulling off her gloves, she walked swiftly to the hammock. "At your service, Cecily," she said banteringly.

Cecil flung herself into her arms.

Cecil disengaged herself. "Where's Hugh?" she demanded. "Did you see him?"

"Following, with Gwen," said Pamela.

"Where's Chris?" she whispered.

Pamela shrugged her shoulders. "Lor', Cecily," she said

lightly, "you are a great girl, my dear, I must say. I arrive, and you haven't a word for me. 'Where's Hugh?' say you, as if I owned him, and then 'Where's Chris?' as if I owned him either. As I've neither in my pocket, perhaps I'd better go, more especially as I see my pony is eating jasmine, which is neither good for him nor the jasmine, I suppose, and you don't seem inclined to call a boy or otherwise prepare for me."

"Oh Pam, I am sorry. But it was all so unexpected, and you know what I mean. There's Letsei coming. Letsei, take the missus' horse and tell Blandina to bring in tea at once. And now, my dear, I'm simply dying to hear your news."

Pamela smiled. "You are a damned little liar, Cecily," she said. "You don't in the least want to hear about me."

Cecil flushed suddenly. "Don't, Pam!" she cried.

Pamela realised suddenly the pathos of that little cry, and the pathos also of that slight figure with unwonted touches of black in the blouse, and the sombre skirt. She passed her hand through the other's arm and drew her into the drawing-room. "Well, well, Cecily," she said, "I'll tell you all about him. But it's a long yarn. Can you put me up for a night or two? I simply had to see you, and as I found father busy, I thought I'd come right on without waiting. I got to Durban last night, about the same time as Chris got to Jo'burg, I suppose. He slipped off in the night at Ladysmith without saying good-bye. Or at least he said good-bye the night before."

"Is he coming here?" asked Cecil breathlessly.

Pamela threw herself into an armchair. "Chris does unexpected things, but I hardly think so—yet," she said.

Cecil was still standing staring at her. Now she dropped on to a cushion at her friend's feet and laid a hand caressingly on her knee. "Pam," she said, "you're playing with me. I can tell. What's the truth?"

Pamela did not reply all at once. She was studying the childish face, the rich black hair, the eager brown eyes of

the younger girl. Her own narrowed as she looked. Then she laughed lightly. "I'll not speak in parables, Cecily," she said. "You shall know all there is to know. But there's not time now. To-morrow you shall hear the whole story, you, with your life in your little hands. And to think that I always thought them weak, Cecily!"

"But—but——" whispered Cecil.

"He loves you with all his heart, if you mean that," said Pamela.

They heard Hugh on the stoep and Pamela's tone changed. "Cecil," she declared, "I've never wanted anything in my life as I want that tea."

("You are a damned little liar," whispered her heart.)

Pamela had not realised how hard that evening was likely to be. For one thing, their reunion inevitably recalled the last night they had spent together. Then Gwen hardly looked at her, and when she did, Pamela thought it was with almost definite hostility. The girl was *distraite* too, and indeed she might well be, for her mind was still re-reading the past in the light of Hugh's words. He himself was inscrutable. Possibly only a close observer would have noticed anything, but Pamela was such an observer and she noticed that he held himself in hand, as it were, the whole time. He did not sleep after dinner now. He was just as tender to his wife, but with a curious dignity which had never been his before. Pamela could not make him out. She could not decide if he suspected Chris or had merely become aware of a barrier between himself and Cecil.

As for Cecil herself, she, poor girl, hung on her guest's words, asking little probing questions, continually referring back to that trek if ever the conversation drifted away from it. And Pamela must needs tell of her ride—there was no escape from that—but possibly only Cecil, who wanted so much, realised how little it was she told. She discussed the Bushman paintings, native life, the Basutoland Government Service, Mokhotlong, Mont aux Sources, gaily, freely, characteristically. But as she brushed her hair before her mir-

ror, when bed-time had at last come, there was a hard smile about her mouth. She realised she had told in detail but one night's camp, that with Mallory in the Eagle's Nest.

It was on the bare hill-side above the farm that the two friends continued their interrupted talk. Gwen had gone off with Hugh in the car, and they had climbed through the young plantations and reached a place of great boulders near the crest of the hill, high up in the pure still air. No sound reached them there but the distant bleat of a sheep in the pastures below when, now and again, a little wind blew up in their direction. The wide landscape slept in the sun. Over a fast browning 'land' a couple of ploughs moved slowly backwards and forwards, and on the distant Berg, the little clouds were drifting together like an aimless flock of sheep. The farm lay silent and motionless at their feet. They were too far to hear even a dog bark in the yard or a dove coo in the woods.

Cecil sat on a great tuft of scented grasses; Pamela had fixed herself on a slab of rock which offered a convenient rest for her feet and allowed her to lean her head back in her hands against its smooth surface. She told her story with the clearness, truth and calm of an admirable witness in a court of law. She scarcely omitted an incident—none that mattered anyway; and she did not hide any detail out of regard for her hearer. But in one particular she was obdurate. She ascribed no motives to herself or to Chris. She might have been given the customary legal warning and to have resolved to bear it always in mind. They had, for example, she said, dined together that second night of the rains in the cave; they had played picquet; she had told his fortune, tricking him with an incident of his voyage she had by chance learned from Gwen; later, it had been curiously easy for her all but to hypnotise him, on an impulse of the moment; it had nearly succeeded, so nearly that he had seen her, Cecil, in a kind of trance, and had kissed her, Pamela, by mistake; he had been awakened and they had gone to bed; he had brought her whisky and she had come out,

en déshabillé, to drink it; so they had slept. Thus and thus the story went on: Mokhotlong, the Mission, the shooting, Butha-Buthe, the railway train; only she did not say *why* she had done this or that, nor did she give her hearer details of conversations which would have made that clear. Thus she allowed Cecil to watch the play, as if, with a powerful telescope, she were even now gazing at some incident being enacted on the great Range on the horizon. Nor, even, did the tones of the reciter help her listener much, so level and emotionless were they. Pamela's sentences were however curt and witty as they always were. And her method was deliberate. It was for her to tell the story, but for Cecil's own heart to interpret it, if she could.

Truth to tell, Pamela said less than she might have done as a result of her listener's manner. Cecil had, in the beginning, glanced now and again restlessly at her, and had interrupted with a question or two; but in a very little while she had abandoned both the tricks that had been so common to her in the old days. She had sat, for the most part, quite still, staring out at the Malutis. And when Pamela had finished, she sat on as still.

At long last she heaved a little sigh. "So that's that, Pam, is it?" she said.

"That is that, Cecily," said Pamela nonchalantly.

"Dear old Pam," said Cecil softly, and not till then did Pamela know that she understood.

It was characteristic that she did not attempt to evade, still less to deny. She even chuckled. "There's no need for sentiment, Cecil," she said. "The biter got bit, that's all, as I see you've guessed. The wound heals or the beast dies. It's quite simple."

"Pam, don't!" cried Cecil, and turned now impulsively towards her. "Oh Pam, what shall you do?"

The elder girl shrugged her shoulders. "Chris asked that, and I told him," she said. "Much the bigger question, Cecily my dear, is what will *you* do?"

"Ah," said Cecil, and stared out again at the Malutis.

Perhaps Pamela's story had taken more in the telling than she was disposed to own. At any rate she allowed a trace of impatience to come into her voice. "Well, my dear," she said, "you must decide. After all, you made him a promise on the Berg yonder, and he's gone through a pretty fair test since then. Chris will be here red-hot after you the moment that he thinks he can. I said I would get you to write, but that was before our slightly dramatic finale, and I've made good by coming instead. But write something you must. If you don't he will come without it. . . . Thus you will write, but what will you write?"

Cecil shook her head rather piteously. "I don't know, oh I don't know," she said. "At least I shall write and say he cannot come yet, whatever happens."

"And what will happen, Cecily?" pressed Pamela remorselessly. "You must act at last; what then will you do?"

Cecil disengaged a little stone and tossed it away from her. Then another and another. Pamela swore under her breath. At that Cecil flushed a little. "What would *you* do?" she questioned.

The simple words unlocked a flood gate. Pamela threw herself off her rock and stood before her companion, her eyes blazing. "Do?" she cried, "what would I do? Why, go to him and not wait for him to come to me, yes, and go at once! There is a man who loves you, and a man who is worth loving. Do you think I would hesitate a single second? Why now, even now, if he lifted a little finger, I'd go to him, yes, *I*. I'd trail across the world after him, his mistress, his—his *thing*. I would give him children and children would link our love. I would share his exile, ease his pain, bear his burden, and—and kill myself when he had done with me!"

But Cecil did not move. She even smiled a little at the other's outburst. "Oh Pam," she said gently, "how are the mighty fallen! The first day I met you, did you not jeer at this very thing? Was this not what poor Eve did, and what the black Eves do now? Did you not wonder why, in

those days, Pam? You called yourself by a different name then, dear, if I remember rightly."

Pamela stared at her. Then, unlike herself, she dropped at her friend's feet. "You're very right, little Cecily," she said and leant her face on the girl's knee. "But Cecily, I was a fool, oh yes, a good big fool. I've learned a thing or two, my dear. Possibly, for all that, I was partly right; possibly love is a trick of old nature, and its ways pretty rough; and possibly Lilith is spared some pain and a deal of drudgery. But—and it's a big but. Listen. There is nothing in the world to set beside love. I advised you once as you remind me, and I remember I advised you again later on. Now, having learned a lesson in the interval, I advise you again. You love Chris, Cecil, and I know he loves you. It is rather wonderful to me how much he loves you, Cecily. He is no Hugh, and this love of yours for him is not as your love for Hugh either. Go to him, Cecil, go to him, little girl. Never mind what comes, go to him. Don't throw away your chance. The gods offer you both a deep drink; drain the glass. Or else you may be sorry all your days."

Cecil stretched her hand out and touched the other's hair caressingly. She let her fingers linger upon it, and even as she did so, she smiled that she should so be treating Pamela. "But why, Pamela?" she queried. "I mean why have you changed? What has made you understand love so that you should come teaching me? What has made you love, Pam dear?"

But Pamela did not answer for awhile. Cecil did not press her question. So still they sat and so intent, that a rock rabbit emerged from his hole and began to nibble grass roots with great content. They both stared at him gravely until Pamela said suddenly "Cheek!" and sat up. He bolted.

She fished in her pocket for her cigarette case. Then she selected and lit her cigarette with every bit of her old accustomed ritual, and Cecil caught herself wondering how often she had watched her do it. And then at length she spoke.

"At long last, Cecil, you know as well as I do that I cannot answer you. Why we women love, God knows. We may guess why He wants us to love, but why we do it, seeing all we know——" and she shrugged her shoulders again. "But I can see what immediately has made me, if you wish to hear. His rescue of me first, I fancy. I felt he was a man; I had never felt that about any man before. And then those old old mountains, and the silences, and the nights. And then the Mission, and those little black brats about the Mother and the Child. When Father Wilfrid talked of motherhood, something gave way finally in me. Not that I want it frightfully, but I know that I want passionately all that leads up to it, and I can see it at the end, a veiled mystery, waiting me. I see it, and I no longer fear to see. I am willing to tread my path even if, at the end, I must lift that veil. And those are the things that have taught me, little Cecily."

Tears stood in Cecil's eyes. "I wish I could even see things as beautifully as you do, Pam, let alone say them," she said softly.

"Nonsense," said Pamela.

"It's not nonsense, but though I can't see things so beautifully, your story has carried me with you step by step, and I can even see a wee bit farther than you can, Pam."

"Eh?" queried the other, just a little mystified.

"Yes, farther. 'Why we women love, God knows,' you said. Yes, but others know too. I'll tell you something else, Pam; how we women love, those others know that also. And only those others, I suppose," she added dreamily.

Pamela pushed against her slightly. "You're fey, Cecily," she said laughingly. "But tell me how and why."

"I can't," said Cecil.

"Can't? Why not."

"No one can tell you. You'll have to wait."

"Wait! What for?"

"Till you've come to the end of the path and lifted the veil, I think, Pamela," said Cecil.

Pamela stared at her. Then she moved her head and turned towards the golden panorama at their feet. "So," she said at length. "What will you do then? We've wandered round the bush, but it comes back to that."

Cecil sighed. "What shall I do? Oh, I don't know," she said wearily. "Write and put him off for a while anyway, as I said. And think over all this, Pam," she added. "I've been thinking, thinking, thinking, all these weeks, but now you've sent me to school again you see."

"Finish the course quickly then," said Pamela sarcastically. "It only took me a fortnight."

"Ah, but there's an extra lesson in mine," retorted Cecil, quickly. Pamela drew on her cigarette and said nothing.

It was agreed that Pamela should stay over the week-end, and on the Sunday afternoon, at tea, Cecil, who had been very quiet, looked up from her tea-tray and said: "Hugh, will you come to church to-night? I rather want to go."

Hugh's hand, holding his cup, shook a little. He put it carefully down. Neither of them had been to church since Ronnie's funeral. "Just as you like, my darling," he said.

"Will you come, Pam?" asked Cecil.

Pamela glanced across at Gwen. "What about you?" she said.

"Oh I'll go, I think," said Gwen.

"Well in that case I'll make up the party," said Pamela. "We shall greatly augment the congregation. Mr. Gressly will have the chance of his life, but really we ought to have given him warning."

Cecil smiled. "He won't take it then, you'll see."

"It will interest his wife anyway," retorted Pamela.

So the car was ordered out and they drove in together. Dusk was falling on the little township as they entered, and through the golden air, the sound of the church bells was very homely. They garaged the car at the hotel, and walked up the street under the trees the few hundred yards to the little church. It really looks like a church, for it has a tower and some architectural pretensions. A motley crowd

drifted by them in twos and threes—Boers on their way to the Dutch Reformed Kirk, Griquas making for the Mission, Kaffirs in Sunday best, a car full of a gay tennis party returning home. Cecil walked by her husband, a thin black veil over her face, and grew yet more silent. She began to wish she had not suggested their coming. Within, a sparse congregation gathered under the oil lamps, and Mr. Gressly, in his surplice and Oxford hood, cast his usual and trained glance around before he began the service. The Springfontein party made a noticeable little group: Hugh erect and impassive; Pamela visibly curious; Gwen with a determined air as if, since she was there, she really had made up her mind not to miss a word or an Amen; and Cecil, a slight figure, bunched up, withdrawn. "When the wicked man . . ." intoned Mr. Gressly, faultlessly.

Cecil hardly heard him. To her it seemed that a little coffin stood even yet on its trestles at the entrance to the sanctuary, and that the place was still full of the half sympathetic, half morbidly curious throng from which she had so shrank but a few weeks before. It was almost as if Mr. Gressly was still saying: "I am the Resurrection and the Life . . .," away down there by the door, as the shuffling feet bore in their burden and Hugh followed to join her in her pew.

Half way through the psalms, she sat down, and Hugh bent over her. "Too hot, dear?" he whispered tenderly. She shook her head. Oh no, it was not that, but what did she care for those old psalms?—she wanted to dream of her dead. And dream she did, setting wonderingly before herself the scenes she associated with him, from those early nights of rapture with her husband, to those last days when the little fellow had so often irritated her though all the while she loved him. She heard not a word of the lesson, and it might have been some one else in her body who stood for the Magnificat. But when the minister came out to the lectern for the second lesson, some phrase or tone struck her, and recalled that dinner at the farm; and Chris. Chris!

She was off again now. The impetuous, clever, vehement Chris—how she loved him. Chris who generalised so dogmatically on everything—the world, morality, women, God. She half smiled to herself; love her as he did, how little he understood her. But did she understand herself?

Her own short story began to race through her mind, with its school-days, its home-coming (which she saw always as if it had been perpetual sunshine then of a sort that never came in these days), her marriage, her child, and now——? What should she do? Where was she drifting? What could the future hold for her?

And then, in that sudden way that we all know so well, a single verse of the lesson leaped out and arrested her consciousness. "She shall be saved through child-bearing, if she continue in faith and love," read Mr. Gressly pompously. And not another word of service or sermon did she hear.

After supper, they sat on the stoep, but with coffee finished Cecil excused herself. She had a letter or two to write, she said. She came out later, and seemed much brighter, much more her old self. She chaffed Hugh a little and saw her guests to bed. On her way back to her own room, she passed her husband's door and glanced in. He was standing at a small toilet table, taking off his collar and tie by the flickering light of two candles. Through the open window behind it, she could see the flood of moonlight on the lawn. Across the room was a camp bed whereon he slept, these days.

"In a hurry, Hugh?' she said, smiling.

He started and turned quickly. The realisation that he was surprised stabbed her. "No, my darling," he said, gazing at her.

"Not tired?"

"Of course not. Why do you ask? Do you want anything?"

"Well, come in and say good-night, will you? I haven't had a chance to talk to you all day."

"Well, dear," said Pamela, "it's good-bye again for a bit. Drop me a line and come and see us, just when you please. The sooner the better, Cecily."

They were standing on the stoep, and Hugh had gone with Gwen to bring round the car. "Good-bye, dear," said Cecil. "I'm awfully glad you came. You come here too whenever you want, won't you? dear old Pam. I can never thank you enough for all you've done for me. And by the way, would you mind posting this in town?"

She handed her a letter, face upwards, and Pamela glanced swiftly from her face to the envelope. "C. Ashurst, Esq.," she read.

Pamela could not help it. "What have you written, Cecily?" she whispered.

"That he mustn't come just yet, but that I shall arrange to be in Durban in six months or so, and will let him know how I am then," said Cecil, serenely.

A score of persons might have watched Pamela put that letter in her bag, and guessed nothing of what she felt. "Good," she said. "If I can help at all, let me know."

Tears gathered swiftly in Cecil's eyes. "You darling," she said gently, "you dear old darling. But I shall manage alone, Pam, when the time comes."

"Why wait so long?" queried Pamela curiously. "I don't think I could, Cecily."

"I shall bide my time," replied the girl. "Good-bye, darling."

"Good-bye."

They kissed, and Pamela ran down the steps into the garden, turning a moment to wave her hand cheerfully. Then she rounded the corner and unlatched the garden gate. "The beast goes home," she said to herself, biting her lip savagely.

CHAPTER VII

"THAT will do, Auntie Tot," said Pamela, glancing over a heap of cut roses at the old servant. "I've not flowers enough for more."

Auntie Tot set down her tray and removed from it to the table two or three large bowls nearly filled with water. That done, she stood a moment watching her mistress as she took up rose after rose, stripped a leaf here and there, cut a stalk occasionally and cleverly filled the vases. She was a motherly old body and she had detected the note of weariness in the girl's voice. "Missus sit down, and let Auntie Tot finish," she volunteered.

Pamela smiled. Auntie Tot's method of flower arrangement was primitive, and not particularly helpful since it all had to be done again sooner or later. But she was grateful for the offer. She welcomed the affection and care that underlay it more than at one time she would ever have thought possible. She had always been so entirely independent; in these days she would have given a good deal to have been able to sit still and let another take control.

So she smiled, but she was quite firm. "No, thanks, Tot," she said. "I'll do it. Bustle out and look to your cooking now. Baas Urfurd will be back for lunch."

The old woman took up her tray and went out. 'Bustle' was not however the word for her departure. Auntie Tot had her own views as to the necessity for hurry. So far as they went, she preferred the household with her young mistress away. The baas took his meals when they were ready; Pamela would have them when she was ready. Auntie Tot had no doubt as to which made for comfort.

Left to herself, Pamela went on steadily with her work, and was filling the last bowl when a sound made her pause. She listened again. It was unquestionably the sound of a motor. At Three Springs, set in its woods, you could hear nothing until a visitor was almost at the door, but when you did hear a car there was no question as to where it was going.

She glanced at a little clock on a side table and decided that it was impossibly early for her father. Still with that long-stalked white rose in her hands, she raised her head to listen, staring across the lounge and out through the open door on to the stoep. The car stopped. There were quick foot-falls. A man came into view ascending the low rock steps to the stoep in haste, two at a time. Pamela bent over her rose-bowl and with a steady hand set her last rose in position.

"Pamela!"

She looked up quietly, and saw him framed against the sunlight in the doorway. "Hullo, Chris," she said coolly. "Where in the world have you sprung from? Come in." And then she turned again to her roses, stepping back a little and giving them a last glance, her head a bit on one side that she might decide the better as to the perfection of their arrangement.

He hesitated perceptibly at his reception. Then he advanced slowly, in contrast to his quick run up the steps, and placed his hat and gloves on a convenient chair. "It's good to see you again, Pam," he said.

She pushed her rose-bowl to the centre of the table and at last turned wholly from it to her visitor. "Really," she said, looking at him out of narrowed eyelids with the suggestion of a smile about her mouth.

He came across to her, half ready to take her hand, but she did not offer it. "Yes, it's good," he said. "I did so hope I'd find you at home. Where's your father?"

"In Harding. He'll be in to lunch. I thought at first that it was his car I heard, but we've an hour or so to wait. Sit

down, won't you. Will you have a drink? I'll just call Tot." And she took a step towards the door.

"No, please don't," he said quickly. "I don't want one really. But I will sit down, if I may. I'm dog tired."

She turned back and sat down herself in a lounge chair by the table, motioning him to another on a great kaross before the big fire-place with its piled but unlit logs. As he seated himself, she leant her head on her hand and looked at him closely. She noticed, then, that he had shaved hastily, that his tie was a bit awry, and that altogether he had the look of a man who had travelled far and in haste. "Where have you come from?" she asked again.

"Durban," he said. "This morning."

"This morning? My dear Chris! Whatever time did you start?"

"I don't know. A little before sunrise anyway. I couldn't sleep a wink, and I made up my mind at last to come here. So I got a car and came."

Pamela said nothing for a moment or two. Then, slowly: "I thought you would have been travelling East rather than West, by now."

"East?" queried Chris. Then he understood. "I know," he said. "So did I. That's why I've come."

Pamela settled a little in her chair and moved her hand a trifle farther forward to shield her eyes. "Tell me," she said.

"I want to, Pam. I've come for that. But God knows how I can."

She made no reply. He was plainly to be left to his own devices. He realised it, and leant forward in his chair almost as if to see her face better. "Cecil is expecting another baby," he said abruptly.

If he had expected her to show surprise, he was mistaken. She sat on silently for appreciable seconds. Then she moved, letting her hand fall and looking up at the picture of herself in front of her, over the fire-place. "I confess I did not expect that development," she said.

Something in her tone gave the man a clue to her mistake. "Hugh is the father, of course," he said quietly.

Now, at any rate, she was startled. She glanced swiftly at him and her thoughts raced. It was some six months since she had parted from Cecil last at Springfontein, Cecil's letter to Chris himself in her hand. She had thought then . . . Oh, it was astounding! "Hugh!" she exclaimed involuntarily.

He nodded. "She told me herself," he said, "and what is more, I think I understand."

Once more Pamela studied him, and she read more in his face than she had done before. "Tell me, Chris," she said again.

His eyes fell before hers, and staring at the kaross at his feet between them he began his tale. "It's all very simple," he said. "She has, I think, made no false or hurried step since—well, since you were at Springfontein. Yes, I know about that now. She wrote to me, you remember, a short letter, non-committal, kind, loving if you like, but non-committal. I see that now. She said I was to wait. That she would be at Durban in six months, and would write again and let me know when she would be there. We could meet then, privately, she said, and talk over things."

He stopped as if he found it hard to go on. Pamela encouraged him this time. "Yes?" she queried kindly.

"Well, I lived through those six months, but honestly, Pam, they were hell. I won't attempt to hide it from you: I wanted her with all my heart. This week she wrote. And yesterday I met her at Durban."

Again he stopped. He was rather like a schoolboy jerking out an awkward confession, Pamela thought even then. It was unusual for Chris to be hard up for words. "Go on," she prompted again.

He leant back in his chair and lifted tired eyes, first to her face and then to her roses. "Yes, we met," he said. "It was very wonderful; I shall never forget it. You know how the parade ends beyond the baths and how the bush

comes down to the shore there, where nobody ever seems to go? Well, we had agreed to meet there. I was a little early, and I thought I would walk to a clump of bananas I could see and turn back to meet her from them. I thought I should see her, then, coming to meet me. Oh Pam, I was so sure that I had the very tickets in my pocket."

He made a sudden dramatic movement and pulled an envelope from his jacket, tossing it down on to the kaross between them, where it lay, a small white momentous thing to Pamela of which she grew almost afraid as the seconds went by. For he went on now, speaking rapidly as if he had got rid of a load.

"You must know all. I had the very tickets—a stateroom in a Jap liner for the Far East. You guessed splendidly. And so I went to my banana clump, thinking, in that silly way we do you know, that I would actually touch them before I turned and saw her coming to meet me along the beach. It is all so real; I can see myself trudging still through that loose sand and flicking at drift-wood with my stick. I reached the bananas—and she was there. It seemed to me like Fate that she should have chosen that very place to wait for me. It was as if it were all arranged."

"Will you ever learn realities, I wonder, Chris?" asked Pamela, bitterly.

His glance challenged hers swiftly. "I have," he said shortly.

But her scorn had checked him. Silence fell between them again. She moved restlessly at last, conscious that this must end. "And so?" she queried.

"So," he went on, in that new tired voice of his, "I took her in my arms and she suffered me. But then she made me sit down. She made me tell her the whole story of our trek, and I did; I hid nothing. And then I asked her how soon she would come away with me."

"And she told you that, after all, she preferred her old prosaic sober-sided Hugh. Poor Chris!"

But not even the sarcasm of her swift guess had power at

that moment to provoke him. "Oh no," he said, "that was not what she said, Pamela. She is far more wonderful than that. You and I together are not a patch on Cecily, Pam. Who would have thought that that little girl . . ." He broke off abruptly.

Possibly for the first time in her life, Pamela was jealous. "You might spare me the rhapsodies, Chris," she said.

The man moved quickly, and she thought suddenly that if he had been nearer he would have tried to take her hand. "Don't, dear," he exclaimed. "Really, I'm past that. Pam, do you know I see what a conceited selfish bore and fool I've been all my days. She has shown me that. It makes no difference that she would deny it. If I love and admire her more than ever, it is quite differently now. But I owe it to her, and you would not have me ungrateful."

Pamela was more moved by his tone than she cared to show. This was a new Chris indeed, but she wished that somehow he did not make her long to take his head in her hands and pillow it on her breast. "I'm sorry," she said, and could not help something of her feeling creeping into her voice.

He looked up steadily, and this time his eyes did not leave her face. "Thanks," he said humbly. "You see, she was really very wonderful, Pamela. She didn't preach of course, not one little bit, but it was of Ronnie that she talked. She said that he was more alive to her than ever. That she felt pledged, bound, to him, and through him to Hugh. And she just said that she had come to see that we could not do as we liked with life; that it was much bigger than we; that we just had to play our part in it as things worked out for us; and—and leave the rest to God."

The girl had never heard him use the Name before as he used it then. She could not have interrupted him now. He went on: "We parted at last, for good in that way. She went back to her life, and she sent me back to mine. I went to the hotel, but all night I couldn't sleep a wink. I felt down and out, Pam. I felt I couldn't go on alone. And then I

thought of you, and I came straight away to you, dear. That is why I'm here now, to ask you if you will marry me, Pamela."

It was utterly unexpected. A flood of feeling surged through her so tumultuously that it hardly seemed possible that she could sit still and bear it. But ultimately an unwelcomed thought dominated the rest. She could not help it. "Leavings, Chris," she said bitterly.

It was as if a blow had been exchanged between them, but Chris took it manfully. He stood up. "I know it looks like that, dear," he said bravely. "I deserve all that, and more. But—but——" (he hesitated). "Pam," he burst out at last, "it's not quite that. You can hardly wonder that I loved Cecil, that I love her still. Any man would. She is one of those women you can't explain—the very Woman God once made. Yes, she's that, though she's little and young and natural and—and very very lovable. But she's mothered something in me into life. I feel almost as if, if I could, I'd hardly dare ask her to marry me now. I feel so little. And I want somebody, Pam, and I want you. You understand. You've no delusions about me, and you've said, after all, that you love me even as I am. And I want your love, dear; it will complete me; it's become the sunshine that I want in my life. I want it more than I can say. I don't deserve it; never, I think, has any woman been asked to forgive all that I am asking you to forgive. But I do ask it. I put all that I am at your feet. Will you take it, Pam? As my wife?"

The girl made a quick movement. "Words," she said scornfully, "words that I expect she put in your mouth."

"Before God, I swear that she did not," he cried quickly. "We did not discuss you, Pamela. If she said anything about you at all, it was only that you had been a wonderful friend to her. And it's something of that that I'm asking. It doesn't seem to me possible that you can love me much, but if you would just take me over, dear, I'll give you my love, for you've won it, and serve you all your life."

Once again the girl had hidden her face behind her hand, and she did not at once reply. Then she spoke evenly, slowly.

"Do you realise that I threw myself at you, Chris? Have you forgotten all that passed between us? It seems to me that in the years to come you might hold me pretty cheap. You may be at mine now, but I was once at your feet. I was not even asking for a husband. And you left me for Cecily without a word, to come back now, straight from her refusal, to ask me to marry you across that very envelope on the floor!"

Outside the sun flooded the flowers and trees, but the man stared at them unseeing. "You know what I would say, but it is useless for me to say it," he said huskily.

She made no reply or movement.

"And that is your last word, Pamela?" he asked, looking down at her.

"Need you ask again?" she retorted bitterly.

He hesitated a moment and made as if to speak. But he choked back the words. Then he walked across the room, took up his hat and gloves, and came back in her direction a step or two. Still she had not moved.

"You are quite right, dear," he said. "It was almost an insult to ask you. I beg your pardon. I will go. But I did not mean to be insolent. I love, admire and respect you with all my heart, Pamela. And I am very grateful to you. Cecil has made a man of me, I hope, but you have shown me how to take hard knocks. Thank you for that, and—and for everything. Good-bye. God give you great happiness one day, dear, for you deserve it. And think not altogether unkindly of me, if you can."

He waited, uneasily, for a moment. But she made no sign at all. Then he turned to the door. "Good-bye," he said again, "and thank you." She heard him pass heavily out.

It was stupidity, but she blinked back tears. Through them, she saw herself over the fire-place again, and found

herself momentarily wondering what the artist had seen in that long-ago self of hers that he had so painted the child's eyes. She dimly remembered the sittings, and in the swift rush of a few seconds she saw her life from that day to one other—why should her thought stop at it?—when she had sat up in an empty railway carriage and been mocked with the sound of her own voice. Was it to mock her for ever?

How or why, she scarcely knew, but she was on her feet. "Chris!" she cried.

He heard upon the garden steps. His heart leapt and he turned and ran back.

She was standing on the big kaross, her hands clasped behind her neck, her head thrown back, her eyes alight with mischief. At her very feet lay his discarded envelope. "It's a pity to waste those tickets, Chris," she said laughingly.

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